WE'RE HERE, LISTEN TO US!

A SURVEY OF YOUNG
WOMEN IN CANADA

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and
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Finally, we offer grateful thanks to the young people who completed the surveys so honestly, in a spirit of generosity that underscores their hope to participate in the world.

INTRODUCTION

How do young women in Canada see themselves? How do they perceive their lives? What do they think of the world they inhabit? What hopes, what problems and fears do they experience? What kind of future do they imagine?

The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (CACSW) wanted to find out answers to these questions. Council members have long been concerned with issues affecting young women (see Appendix C for official CACSW policy recommendations). They wanted to provide young women with new knowledge for a new world. But first, they determined, they must hear the voices, thoughts, and opinions of young women themselves. To share a glimpse of the worlds of young women, to look through the windows of their experience, is the aim of this national survey commissioned by the CACSW.

The young women who responded to the survey gave expression to the ways they experience their lives. The themes that emerge from the survey are those identified, defined, and elaborated by young women themselves. They offer their voices to the conversations which form a culture's values and decisions.

About Adolescence

Adolescence is both a stage in the biological life cycle and a historical creation. Its meanings change over time. One hundred, two hundred years ago, the years between 12 and 20 had different social meanings than they have today. Adolescence as we understand it is an invention.

Parents, educators, employers, court workers, journalists, and politicians all create ways of thinking about the behaviour of young people. Based on their understandings of what the culture requires and on their hopes for the future, adults design social and educational institutions for young women and young men. These bring children through the adolescent years to become the kinds of adults required by the state, economy, and culture.[1]

As a country changes, requiring new kinds of adults, its definition of adolescence, its fears for young people, and its hopes for them also change. Thus, young people are portrayed differently in different times and places, their depictions corresponding to contemporary values and needs.

For example, consider another survey, first answered by educators in the 1940s and then by educators in the 1980s. Each time, they were asked to identify the main problems which inhibited learning. In the 1940s, the respondents said the problems were students running in the halls, chewing gum, talking out of turn, and wearing inappropriate clothes. In the 1980s, the educators identified pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, unemployment, child abuse, rape, assault, and gang warfare as the issues impeding learning.[2] Cultures change; so do their adolescents.

The economic developments of the years after 1945 – new technologies, new modes of consumption, a different labour force – also produced new family structures, redefined communities and educational institutions, revised immigration laws, and altered power relationships. These in turn have affected the portrayal of adolescents in Canada.

In the 1950s they were described as clean-cut, materialistic conformists, reflecting a decade of relative prosperity. In the 1960s, a time of political turmoil, young people were depicted as angry, assertive, and idealistic. During the prosperous and self-satisfied 1970s, teenagers were stereotyped as apathetic, conservative, and self-serving. The 1980s yielded descriptions of adolescents fearful about the state of the planet while indulging in expensive personal gratification.

In other words, they looked not unlike adults, for it was adults who saw them, who defined them, who hoped to shape them. These characterizations, of course, masked diversity and resistance. Many young people did not conform to the images, while others actively resisted them and, to varying degrees, re-shaped them to suit their own visions.

Young people do not live in a self-contained culture. From families, young people learn trust and personal discipline; from friends they learn comradery and democratic ideals; from solitude they gain self-understanding; and from schools they derive cognitive skills.[3] For some, their growth is blocked by obstacles: a harsh environment, a repressive social system, a depressed childhood. Some are overwhelmed, others underchallenged; both imbalances limit a person's ability to control her/his own actions. Young people need to believe in their eventual success.[4]

Adolescents also need peers and adults whom they can respect, and who are available and interested in them.[5] If they are

emotionally abandoned to a world defined only by their age, they will be unable to challenge and re-shape the world with their creativity and resistance.

Young people want to become participants in our common world. The CACSW survey findings can help us think about how this might be achieved.

The CACSW Survey

Administration

The survey was distributed by participating schools across Canada in March and April of 1990 to students in grades 8, 9, and 10. A total of 3207 young people completed the survey (1603 females and 1604 males). Ninety-four per cent of them ranged in age from 13 to 16 years. The survey was administered on a scale large enough to be generalized at the national level to a similar population, with a confidence interval of five percentage points either way. Please see Appendix A for more detailed information on the survey methodology.

Format

The survey (see Appendix B) consisted of 43 items. The first four items requested identification by sex, region, age, and living arrangements. The next four items sought information about hours of work, homework, and reading. The following 29 statements, referred to as closed-ended because they offered a limited range of choices, requested that students circle the extent of their agreement or satisfaction with different topics. Finally, students were invited to respond in their own words to six open-ended questions.

Devised in consultation with adolescents and with CACSW members and staff researchers, the closed-ended statements were designed to be as true to young women's experience as possible. They revealed not only the young people's thoughts and feelings on certain issues but also the intensity of their responses: participants were asked to react to a given statement on a scale ranging from "**strongly agree**" to "**strongly disagree**", or from "**very satisfied**" to "**very dissatisfied**".

Data collected from the first 37 items – the numeric or quantitative data – provide evidence of "what is". However, collective profiles,

or aggregated data, mask diversity. The qualitative data collected from the six open-ended questions, in which young people raised their own concerns and issues, added diversity and depth to the quantitative data. The themes they raised here ultimately served to organize the findings. Fleshing out, illustrating, and sometimes expanding the statistical data in unexpected ways, the young women's commentaries breathe life into the survey findings; they express the spirit and mood of young people in ways that no compilation of tables and charts could do.[6]

Limitations

The survey does not include the views of young people who left school before graduating. It is estimated that approximately 30% of young people in Canada drop out of school – and the figure is higher for Aboriginal students. Working or unemployed, they live in different circumstances from those of young people in school, and are almost certain to have opinions and thoughts quite different from those of students. Research is needed to record and incorporate their perspectives.

The survey findings only generalize about gender at the national level. The study did not isolate characteristics such as ethnic background, family income, disabilities, sexual orientation, or urban/rural setting. The sample of young people was not large enough to support generalizations about these categories at the national level.

The same is true of regional and age differences. While some regional and age trends emerge in the survey findings, they are included only when they are pronounced; they are revealing, but not conclusive. They reflect only the respondents' views, and cannot be generalized.[7]

Whose Standards, What Standards?

The reporting of a per cent does not imply any standard. Per cent means simply, "of each hundred". Deciding whether a per cent meets a standard, whether it is "good enough" or "high enough", requires making a value judgement. The following example illustrates this point. If the airline industry placed an airplane on the market about which it was 77% confident, society would not judge this as acceptable. Similarly, when only 77% of young women agree that they are self-confident, this too is unacceptable. Each young woman's life is important.

A comparable sample of young men was included in the study. Comparisons are not intended to establish either sex as normative; rather, they draw to our attention commonalities and differences. Public and educational policy must come to include awareness of different needs, acknowledging the perceptions and opinions of the two sexes.

The Chapters

Chapter One of the book looks at the self-image of young women, analyzing their comments about themselves and their characteristics such as health, appearance, and personal aspirations.

In Chapter Two, the scope broadens to encompass the "immediate world" that young women move in – their family, friends, and school environment. Here the difference between the survey findings and cultural stereotypes about adolescents emerges vividly.

Chapter Three looks at young women's views on the "external world" they know through the workplace and through politics. In this chapter their need for both independence and interdependence is emphasized.

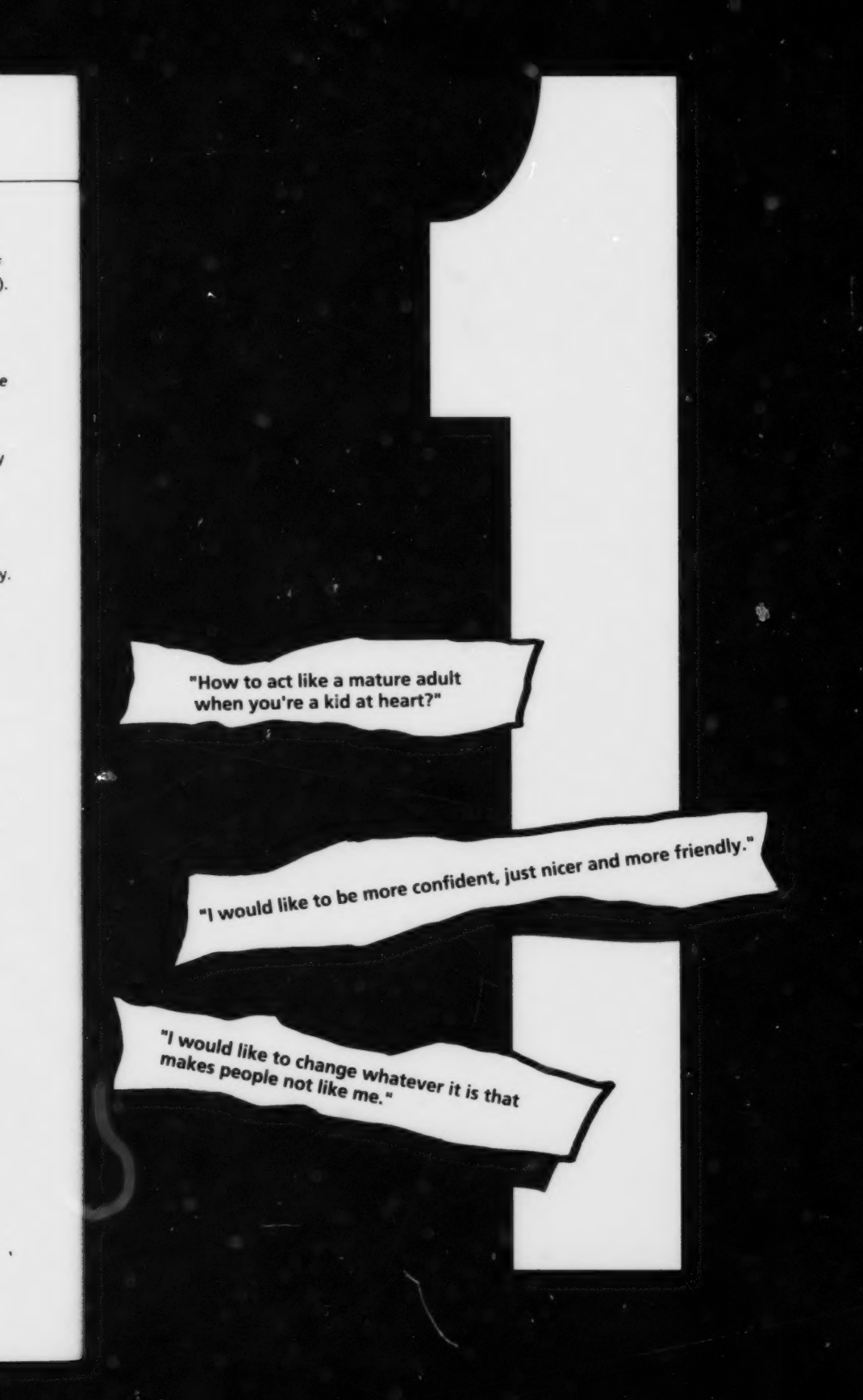
Chapter Four examines the way young women integrate these three "worlds": the world of the self; the "immediate world" of friends, family, and school; and the public sphere. This chapter is informed by the young women's commentaries, which guided and shaped the statistical analysis. Their desire to understand and fully to become part of the world we all inhabit pervades this chapter, as the personal and the political blend in their own words.

Connections

Drawing from the statistical evidence and the qualitative data in this study, women who hope to share their ideas and ideals with younger women can enter their worlds, learn where they intersect with their own and where they diverge. They can share visions of their present and future places, and share the quest for equality. Young women, speaking out and being heard, will discover what they themselves want to bring into being. Let us hear what they have to say.

ENDNOTES: Introduction

1. The classic work on the history of childhood is Phillippe Ariès, *Centuries Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 19
2. Gerald Oster and Janice Caro, *Understanding and Treating Depressed Adolescents and Their Families* (New York: Wiley, 1990), p. 200.
3. Mihaly Czikszentmihalyi and Reed Larson, *Being Adolescent: Conflict an Growth in the Teenage Years* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), p. 221.
4. Jerome Kagan and Robert Coles, eds., *Twelve to Sixteen: Early Adolesce* (New York: Norton, 1972). p. 100.
5. Robert Coles and Geoffrey Stokes, *Sex and the American Teenager* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), p. 10.
6. Myrna Kostash's powerful interview-based book shows just how rich a stu drawn from young women's comments can be. See Myrna Kostash, *No Kidding: Inside the World of Teenage Girls* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987).
7. As for young people in northern communities, it was impossible to draw any conclusions at all: schools in the Yukon and Northwest Territories d not respond to the CACSW request for permission to administer the sur Schools under federal jurisdiction as well as schools with fewer than 20 students were also not included in the survey.


"How to act like a mature adult when you're a kid at heart?"
"I would like to be more confident, just nicer and more friendly."
"I would like to change whatever it is that makes people not like me."

How do young women in Canada feel about themselves? How do they describe and define themselves? The CACSW survey covered a wide range of topics relating to the self: self-esteem, self-image, health, sexual abuse, stress, and future expectations. The survey findings provide insights into young women's perceptions of themselves, their appearance, their health, and their place in the future.

A strong sense of self is essential to healthy development. However, self-esteem and self-confidence do not develop in a social vacuum. A young woman comes best to value herself when she is valued by people she knows and is appreciated by her society for her own qualities, not because she fits a stereotype.

The results show that most adolescent women feel good about themselves, think they have a number of good qualities, and tend to feel self-confident. However, the findings also reveal that young men have a stronger sense of self and enjoy greater self-satisfaction than do young women. Gender differences increase with age. Young women also appear to suffer more often from feelings of loneliness and stress, and feel more vulnerable to physical abuse.

Young women's psychological development combines their search for identity with their search for connection. The dilemma for young women is to derive a sense of self within the social structures around them. However, these often predicate their approval of young women on "being", rather than "doing"[1], i.e., being passively "feminine" rather than doing things as active agents. The result is that young women's self-assessments often suffer as they repress or deny the active parts of themselves.[2]

SELF-ASSESSMENT

The CACSW survey contained three closed-ended statements focusing on the way young women see themselves. Respondents were asked to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with statements about themselves, their self-confidence, and their personal qualities. Their responses to these items reveal differences in the way young women and young men perceive themselves.

I Feel Good about Myself

A majority of 83%[3] of young women agree with the statement, "I feel good about myself": 30% **strongly agree** and 53% **agree.** Of the remaining young women, 10% disagree, and 7% are undecided.[4]

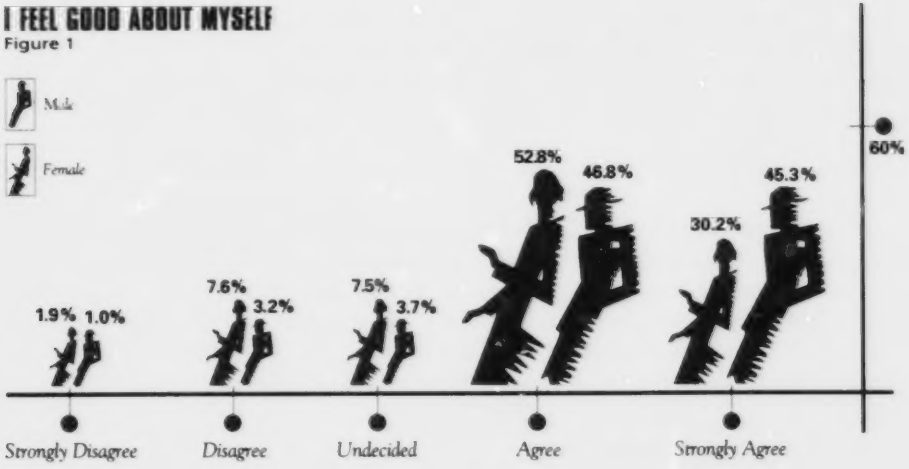
15% fewer young women than young men strongly agree they feel good about themselves.

Twice as many young women than young men say they don't feel good about themselves.

The findings also show that about 92% of young men feel good about themselves – almost 10% more than young women. Even more striking is the fact that 45% of young men **strongly agree** they feel good about themselves – 15% more than young women. Finally, about twice as many young women, in comparison to young men, do not feel good about themselves.

The difference between the sexes on this item increases with age. While there is only a difference of 5% between the sexes at age 13, that gap widens to 10% by age 16. Adolescent men's responses rise slightly with age, while they decrease slightly among young women. Self-esteem decreases over time, as young women gradually become more aware of their status in a society that values them less than their male peers.[5]

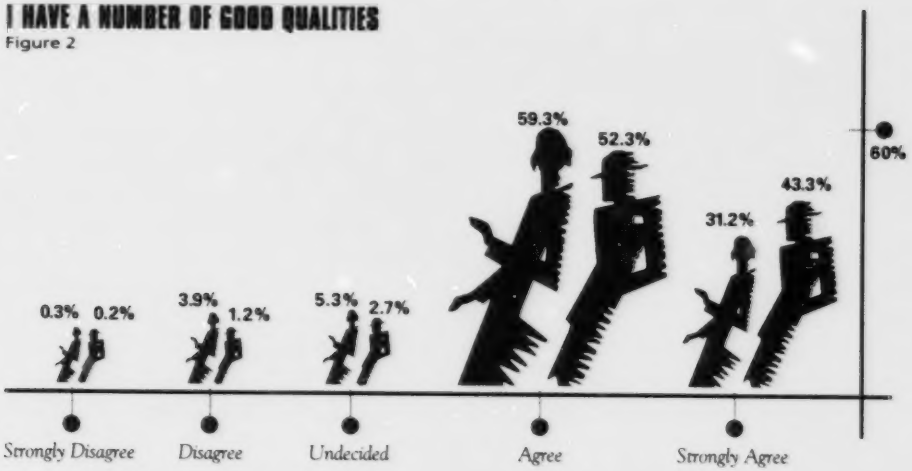
I FEEL GOOD ABOUT MYSELF
Figure 1



I Have a Number of Good Qualities

Ninety-one per cent of young women agree they have a number of good qualities. Just under a third say they **strongly agree** with the statement – but 12% more of the male participants **strongly agree**. Responses do not seem to vary with age in this case.

I HAVE A NUMBER OF GOOD QUALITIES
Figure 2

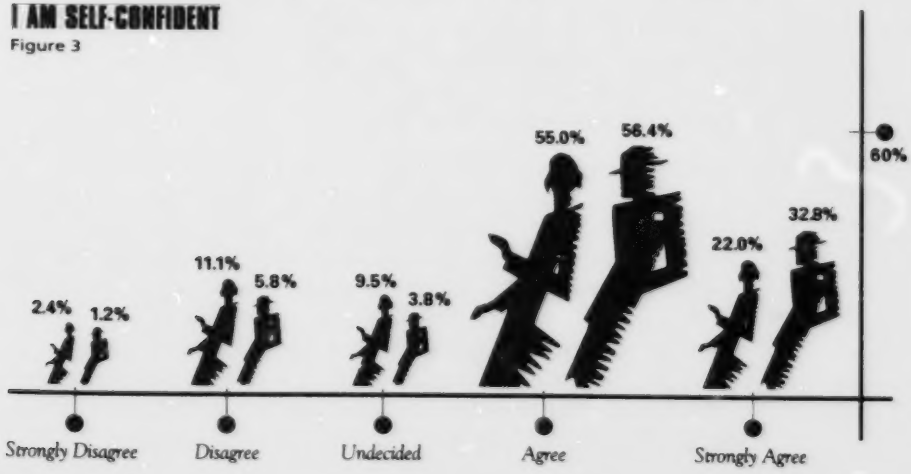


I Am Self-Confident

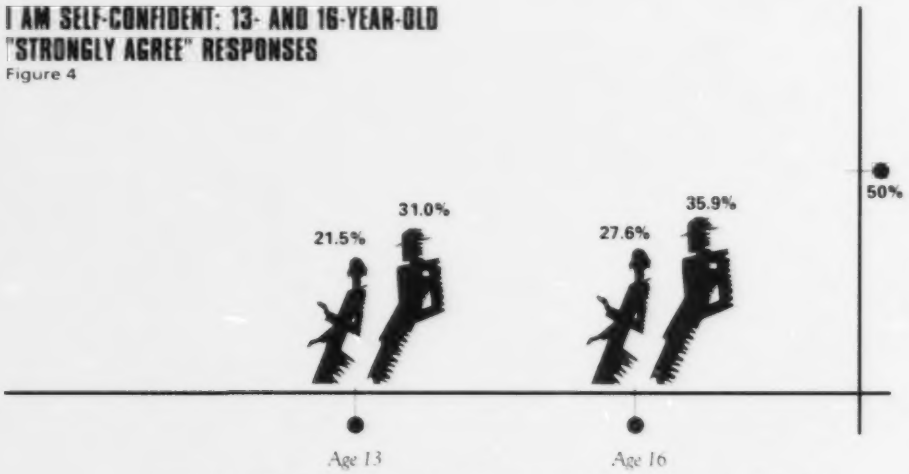
Although 77% of young women say they are self-confident, the responses reveal a striking difference between the two sexes' assessment of their self-confidence. At age 13, almost one-third of the male respondents **strongly agree** they are self-confident – 10% more than their female counterparts.

While self-confidence for both sexes increases with age, the number of young women who **strongly agree** they are self-confident even at age 16 is 28% – still below the figure for the 13-year-old boys. In fact, by age 16, the gender gap in self-confidence

I AM SELF-CONFIDENT
Figure 3



I AM SELF-CONFIDENT: 13- AND 16-YEAR-OLD "STRONGLY AGREE" RESPONSES
Figure 4



grows to 14%: 78% of young women agree they are self-confident, compared to 92% of 16-year-old men.

Responses in Quebec to some of the self-assessment statements differ from those in the other regions of the country. Not only are young Québécois of both sexes more self-confident than respondents in other regions, but it is the only province where both sexes respond equally positively to the statement, "I have a number of good qualities." In fact, not one Québécois woman disagreed!

By contrast, young people of both sexes are least self-confident in the Atlantic provinces. They also disagree that they have "a number of good qualities" more often than in other regions. In response to the statement, "I feel good about myself", fewer young Atlantic women agree than do young women in other regions.

Almost 60% of the young women who give themselves a low self-assessment say they are unhappy with their lives as a whole.

Self-assessment: Wrap-up

Findings clearly show that young women rank themselves lower than young men in their self-assessments. Whether it is a matter of evaluating their good qualities, their self-confidence, or their feelings about themselves, young women are noticeably less at ease in the world of the self than are young men.

Other studies have reached the same conclusion. The 1988 *Canada Youth and AIDS* report found that "males consistently demonstrated higher self-esteem than females in each age group."[6] Similarly, a 1989 U.S. study found that women generally

underrated their own competence, seeing themselves as having less influence, lower academic ability, and fewer prospects for success than men anticipated for themselves.[7]

As the results illustrate, this gap is reflected not only by the percentages or the amount of agreement, but also in the intensity of the responses (**strongly agree/strongly disagree**). The gender gap that emerges may suggest young women's sensitivity to the world they inhabit – to their diminished status and opportunities within it.[8]

There is a link between young women's self-assessments and the extent of their satisfaction with their lives. A glance at the profile of the young women with low self-assessments shows that almost 60% of those who **disagreed** or **strongly disagreed** with the statements, "I feel good about myself", "I have a number of good qualities", and "I am self-confident", said they were also **very dissatisfied** or **somewhat dissatisfied** with their lives as a whole. Young women who are not self-confident and do not feel good about themselves represent a considerable number of young women who may be psychologically, physically, and sociologically at risk.

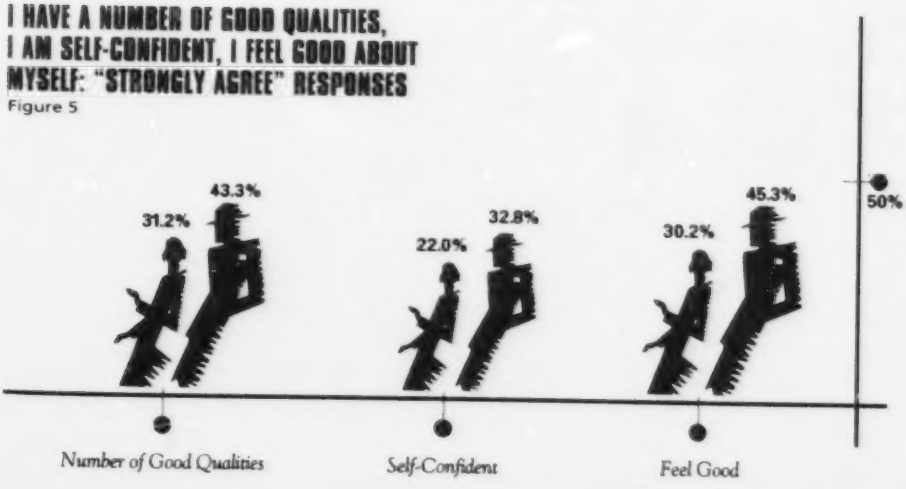
Self-assessments do not emerge in a vacuum. A recent study by the American Association of University Women found that race is a factor in self-esteem. More Black than white adolescent women are self-confident in high school; they derive that quality from family support.

12% fewer young women than young men strongly agree that they have a number of good qualities.

Quebec is the only province where young women and young men equally feel they have a number of good qualities.

I HAVE A NUMBER OF GOOD QUALITIES, I AM SELF-CONFIDENT, I FEEL GOOD ABOUT MYSELF: "STRONGLY AGREE" RESPONSES

Figure 5



The study suggested that Black parents "often teach their children there is nothing wrong with them, only with the way the world treats them."[9]

Another study comparing Black and white adolescents found that young white women had lower self-esteem when evaluating their behaviour and happiness than did young Black women, who rated themselves higher in both these areas.[10]

APPEARANCE

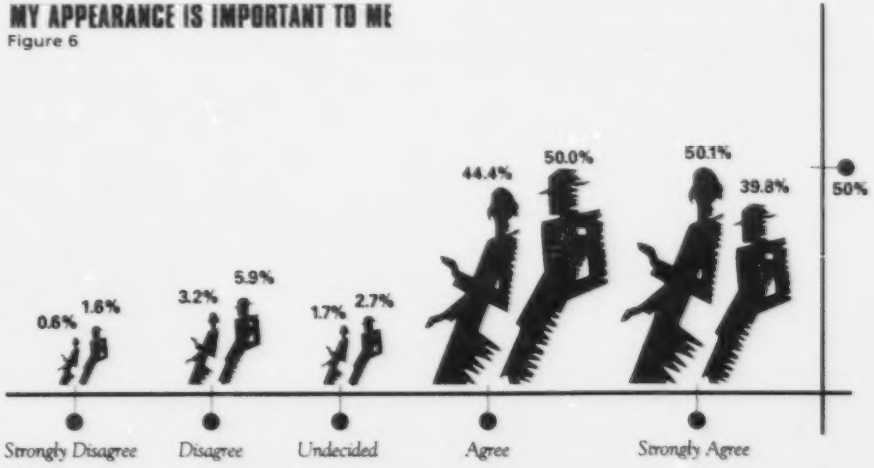
Only one-half as many young women as young men say they are very satisfied with their appearance.

As previous studies have shown, appearance is an important factor in self-esteem for adolescent women.[11] The results of the CACSW survey offer insights into the way young women feel about their appearance, both through their responses to closed-ended statements, and through some of the commentaries the women volunteered in the open-ended questions.

My Appearance is Important to Me

Young women are almost unanimous in placing high importance on their appearance; however, young men are far more satisfied with their appearance. While 95% of young women agree with the statement, "My appearance is important to me", only 81% describe themselves as satisfied with their appearance.[12]

MY APPEARANCE IS IMPORTANT TO ME
Figure 6



Half the young women **strongly agree** that appearance is important to them, but only 13% say they are **very satisfied** with their appearance. By contrast, almost twice as many young men – 25% – say they are **very satisfied** with it. In all, 88% of young men are satisfied with their appearance – 7% more than the young women.

What Young Women Say about Appearance

Young women's worries about their appearance also emerge in their responses to the open-ended questions. Asked to name three things they would like to change about themselves or about the world, 18% wrote that they would change their appearance. Asked to list five "concerns, problems, or fears", 12% named appearance.

Almost one in five women list appearance as one of the things they would like to change about themselves or the world.

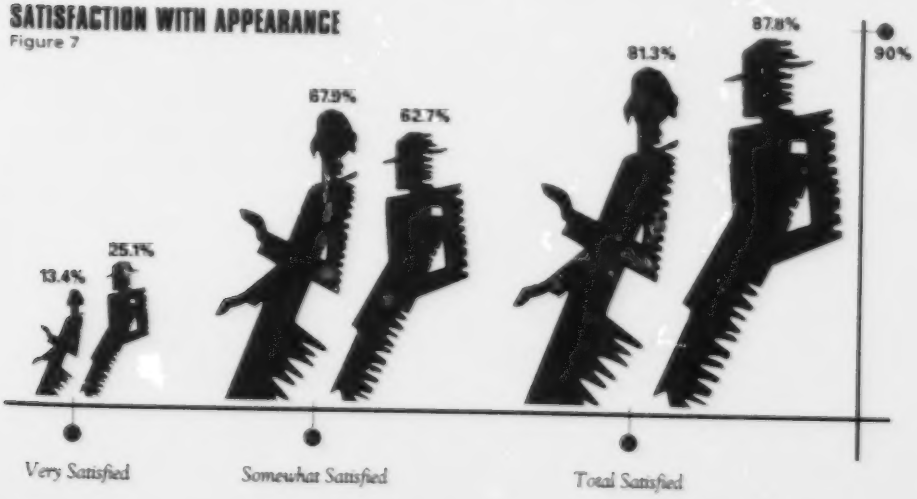
Although many studies pinpoint weight as the focus of young women's body-image concerns, fewer than 25% of the respondents mentioned weight as a concern in this survey. In fact, an equal number listed "being pretty", "looking like a model", and "being beautiful". One 15-year-old wrote, "I wish I was taller. I wish I had blond hair."

Young women tend to feel they need "the right packaging" to succeed in their personal and public lives.

Young women named a variety of worries: concerns about their "nose", "teeth", "height", "laugh", "muscles", "acne, zits, pimples". When adults comment on adolescent obsession with weight, they may simply be reflecting their own preoccupations. In fact, young women are concerned with almost all facets of their appearance.[13]

Bodies are clearly part of the self, not merely a prop for it. The fact that so many of the young women said they were dissatisfied with

SATISFACTION WITH APPEARANCE
Figure 7



an integral part of themselves is disturbing. These findings should send a warning to young women in a society which stresses the ideals of feminine beauty and thinness, places a higher value on beauty for females than for males, and minimizes the value of women's other qualities.

Findings from a recent U.S. study showed that, regardless of personal qualities, young women feel they need "the right packaging"[14] in order to succeed both in the private realm and in the public sphere. If this is true, the low extent of satisfaction with appearance reported by the young women is likely not only to affect their self-esteem, but also to have an impact on their aspirations and the futures they feel are open to them.

HEALTH

Young women's extent of satisfaction with their health decreases with age. At age 13, almost half the young women said they were **very satisfied** with their health. By age 16, the rate had decreased by nearly 20%, with only 32% of the young women saying they were **very satisfied**.

By age 16, 18% fewer young women than young men feel very satisfied with their health.

Young women are less and less satisfied with their health as they grow older.

As in the self-assessment statements, this change also reveals a gender gap that widens markedly over time. The number of young men who are **very satisfied** with their health decreases only 5% between the ages of 13 and 16, falling to 50% from 55%. Only 6% more 13-year-old boys say they are **very satisfied** with their health than do 13-year-old girls; however, by age 16, 18% more young men than young women feel **very satisfied**.

What do young women's assessments of their physical health tell us about their lives as a whole? Research suggests that girls associate poor health with emotional and social concerns; girls who say they are in poor health often show signs of anxiety and depression as well.[15] In that sense, the survey results suggest that adolescent women face increasing emotional strain or unhappiness, expressed through the "barometer" of physical health.[16]

Other studies indicate that, as adolescents grow older, they tend increasingly to regard poor health as an obstacle to success, worrying that sickness, accidents or violence might diminish their opportunities within the competitive environment.[17]

A flagging sense of good health, then, poses a very real psychological barrier to success for young women as they set out to find their place in a culture where wellness and fitness are virtues and where they are considered important to success. Young men, by contrast, grow more and more confident about themselves as healthy and fit for a competitive culture.

SEXUAL ABUSE

Young women's health is more at risk than young men's in a specific way: they suffer a higher incidence of sexual abuse than do young men. Sexual abuse emerged as an important concern in both the open- and closed-ended questions and statements. Significantly more young women reported abuse and feelings of vulnerability to abuse than did young men. This sense of vulnerability increases with age.

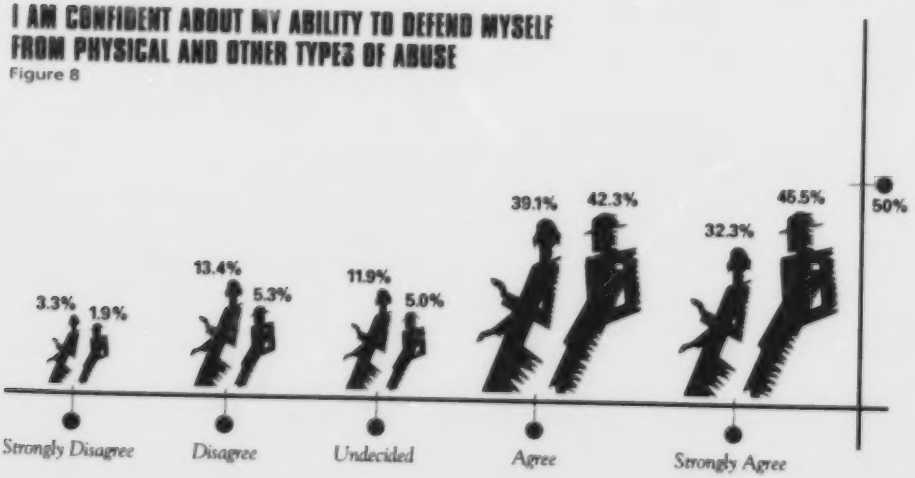
Eighteen per cent of the young women and 10% of the young men reported sexual abuse in the survey.[18] Slightly higher than 1% of both sexes said they were undecided.[19]

Asked whether they could defend themselves against physical and other types of abuse, 29% of young women feel they could not, or are not sure if they could; 71% say they feel they could. Young women's sense of vulnerability increases with age: 10% more 16-year-olds say they feel unable to defend themselves than do 13-year-olds. In response to an open-ended question, one young

Almost one in five of the young women said they had been sexually abused.

Young women who are open about having been abused have a higher self-esteem than those who have not disclosed abuse.

I AM CONFIDENT ABOUT MY ABILITY TO DEFEND MYSELF FROM PHYSICAL AND OTHER TYPES OF ABUSE
Figure 8



woman spoke wistfully of the sense of security she thought young men enjoy when it comes to fear of assault: "I wish that I could feel as comfortable walking by myself as my male friends do."

The survey findings show that young women who acknowledge having been abused have a higher self-esteem than those who do not acknowledge their abuse. Of the young women who said they had been sexually abused, 40% named abuse as a concern in many other parts of the questionnaire. For example, they wanted to hear speakers and receive more information on the subject. These same young women tended to rate themselves as high as non-abused women on statements about self-confidence and their good qualities.

"I'd help the people that are abusing children to realize the harm they are doing."

"I wouldn't be so untrusting around males. I would not let anyone touch me where it didn't feel right when I was little."

"I wish the guy that sexually abused me to be behind bars which he is not."

By contrast, the 60% of respondents who said they had been abused but did not raise the subject elsewhere in the questionnaire had lower assessments of their self-esteem. They tended to rate themselves low in self-confidence and in satisfaction with their lives, and disagreed that they had a number of good qualities.

For these young women, the harmful experience of sexual abuse seems to have been compounded by their denial of or silence about the matter. Beside the statement on sexual abuse, one young woman wrote in the margin, "I don't want to answer (from this [you can] figure the answer)." As might be expected, her self-assessments were not positive. Sexual abuse of children and teenagers within the family is a particularly profound betrayal of children by adults, with its loss of emotional safety that may abruptly interrupt growth toward maturity.[20]

Taking Action on Sexual Abuse

Some of the young women's commentaries reflected a keen awareness of the political and social changes that are needed to stem abuse. Asked what changes she would make in her personal life and in the world, one 14-year-old wrote, "I'd help the people that are abusing children to realize the harm they are doing." Another said she would like to "make children more aware of sexual abuse from family, uncles, aunts, babysitters", after writing, "I wouldn't be so untrusting around males. I would not let anyone touch me where it didn't feel right when I was little." A 15-year-old wrote, "I wish the guy that sexually abused me to be behind bars which he is not."

The moving commentary by these young women powerfully supports psychotherapist Sandra Butler's appeal for educational programs which help teach children their right to their bodies, and for public and social support for safe houses and shelters for adolescents.[21]

Whatever the specific strategies, abuse victims must have support if they are to speak out. While this can be dangerous, especially for victims of abuse in the family, the survey results indicate that not speaking out may be more dangerous.[22]

Women and girls who remain silent run the risk not only of being abused again, but also of suffering from a loss of self-esteem and sense of self. For victims of family abuse, these dangers may outweigh even the considerable risks of speaking out, such as the risk of being removed from the home, compounding loss of trust with loss of security.

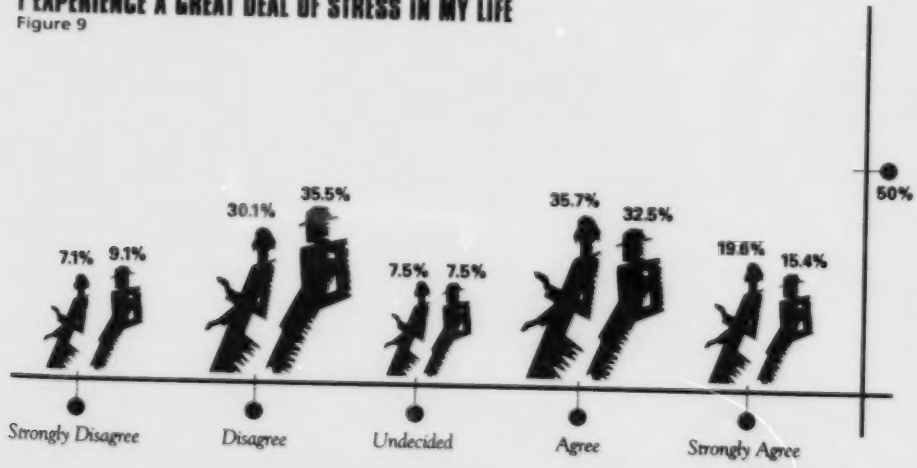
Other studies have confirmed that family sexual abuse of children and teenagers may have devastating effects on the development of personal identity, self-esteem, and interpersonal relationships. It may also cause destructive or self-destructive behaviours that can persist into a troubled adulthood.[23]

As many of the young women themselves said, ending sexual abuse is a pressing and critical project, one that all women must work on together.

STRESS

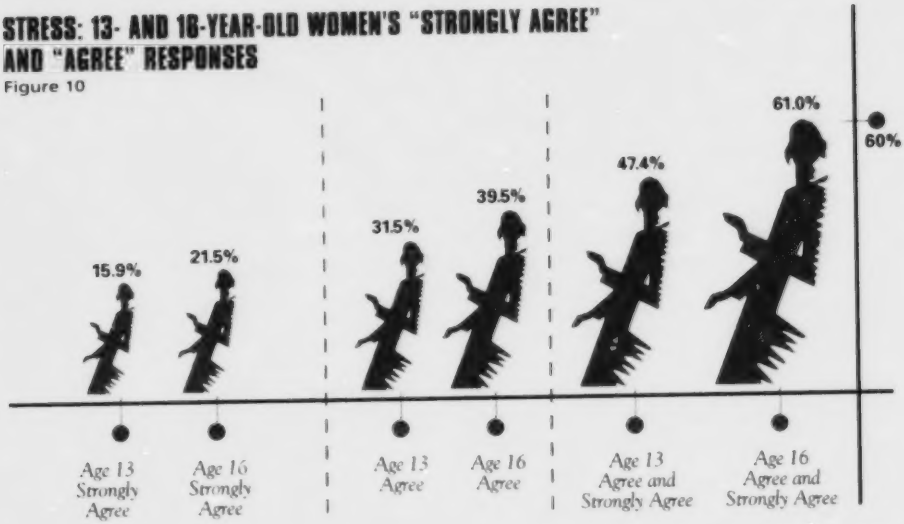
Young women experience more stress than do young men. The increase in stress felt by young women as they get older is particularly striking.

I EXPERIENCE A GREAT DEAL OF STRESS IN MY LIFE
Figure 9



STRESS: 13- AND 16-YEAR-OLD WOMEN'S "STRONGLY AGREE" AND "AGREE" RESPONSES

Figure 10



I Experience a Great Deal of Stress in My Life

By age 16, 61% of young women say they are under great stress – 14% more than young men.

One in five young women of all ages strongly agree that they are under a lot of stress.

Fifty-five per cent of young women and 48% of young men agree that they experience a great deal of stress. Particularly striking is the increase in stress reported by 16-year-old women. At age 13, 47% of them report that they experience a great deal of stress; at age 16, 61% agree with the statement – an increase of 14%. For young men, reported stress is constant at about 46% for both 13-year-olds and 16-year-olds. Almost 20% of young women of all ages **strongly agree** that they are under a great deal of stress.

Previous studies have shown that young women react to stress with emotional behaviour; and to deal with it, they turn to others for emotional support. Young men, on the other hand, turn to physical exercise to cope with stress.[24] Experiencing a greater need for emotional support to deal with that stress, young women may find it harder to meet their needs for emotional support than do young men. Their emotional needs sometimes remain unmet. In the CACSW survey, about 9% more young women than young men said they often felt lonely.

ASPIRATIONS

Desires for self-improvement, career ambitions, and hopes for the future often emerged in the young women's written comments. They were also the subject of some of the closed-ended statements. Together, the findings trace a profile of the hopes young women hold for themselves and their personal, social, and material development for the future.

Self-improvement

When asked what changes they would make to the world or to themselves, and what concerned them most, young women list issues related to the self among the top six subjects. They frequently express a desire for self-respect and self-love, while also hoping for affection and respect from others.

Many of them long for closer ties with others – and, at the same time, they want greater independence. Of those who included comments on the self, 44% said they feared rejection from others: being abandoned, being alone, being laughed at. "I would like to change whatever it is that makes people not like me", wrote one young woman. They spoke of hopes for love and for intimate relationships, as well as for greater autonomy.

"In my personal life I'd like to stop and judge myself before judging others."

"I would like to be more confident, just nicer and more friendly."

Some wished to change things about themselves which they perceived as barriers to connectedness. Many said they wanted to be "more likeable", "a better person", less shy, more patient, less judgemental: "In my personal life I'd like to stop and judge myself before judging others." A 16-year-old wrote, "I would like to be more confident, just nicer and more friendly." Another 16-year-old wrote that she wanted "to be more wise and to make sure I would make the right decisions." Another wondered "how to act like a mature adult when you're a kid at heart." Yet another wanted "to have a better understanding of who I am."

Others wanted to improve their skills: to budget their time and money better, to be better musicians, to express themselves better. "This is selfish", wrote one young woman, "but I'd love to better myself in sports, especially basketball, volleyball, and hockey." She clearly expressed the tension between self-development, or autonomy, and interdependence; the need for both is a conception central to the work of feminist psychologists.[25]

Thinking about Future Paid Work

An overwhelming majority of young women say they will be working for pay once they finish school. Indeed, almost 90% of young women agree with the statement, "I expect that ten years from now I will be employed full-time." Over half of them **strongly agree** they will be working for pay long after ending school.[26]

The future is very much on the minds of young women. Almost 60% say they know what they are going to do after high school, with a third **strongly agreeing** they are sure of their plans.

Almost 90% of young women say they expect to be working 10 years after school.

Only 3% of young women feel they won't finish high school.

Furthermore, 84% of young women say they plan their high school subjects with their future in mind. Fully 97% say they intend to finish high school. This is startling, considering that almost a third of all students in Canada leave school before receiving a diploma (the figure is even higher for Aboriginal students). The CACSW survey shows that only 3% actually expect or plan to drop out. What happens to those expectations?

Young women see little discontinuity between their current and their future lives. They want to work hard, do interesting work, and be understanding of other people.[27] Responsibility and independence are compatible for them.[28] Clearly, they will not all achieve the control they yearn for in their lives.[29] Marlene Mackie, a sociologist, writes that "[g]irls tend to **voice** the ethic of achievement, but to **plan** marriage."[30] In a ghetto where young women expressed aspirations for law school, expensive cars, and travel, a local social worker sadly said, "No one ever gets out of there."[31]

Young women in Canada could be encouraged to develop realistic expectations for their futures, including the possibility and the advantages of "being qualified to earn their own living in a well-paid field even if that field is not traditional for women."[32] The Women's Bureau of Labour Canada insists that "[e]ducational programs are needed to ensure that Canadian girls have a realistic picture of their future lives."[33]

SUMMARY

The survey findings indicate differences between young women and young men. Young women are less likely to feel they have good qualities, to feel self-confident, and to feel good about themselves. They are also less satisfied with their appearance, although their appearance is more important to them than it is to young men.

Young women feel lonely more often than do young men; they also report more stress. Finally, they are less satisfied with their health and their life as a whole than are young men. Overall, young men reveal a stronger sense of self and greater self-satisfaction than do young women.

Having said all this, it is important to keep in mind that, in general, many young women's self-perceptions are positive. When they become more highly valued by society, they will also value themselves more highly.

Now let us move out of the world of the self, and into society. How do young women see the world around them? How do they see their own place in that world?

GLANCE-BOX

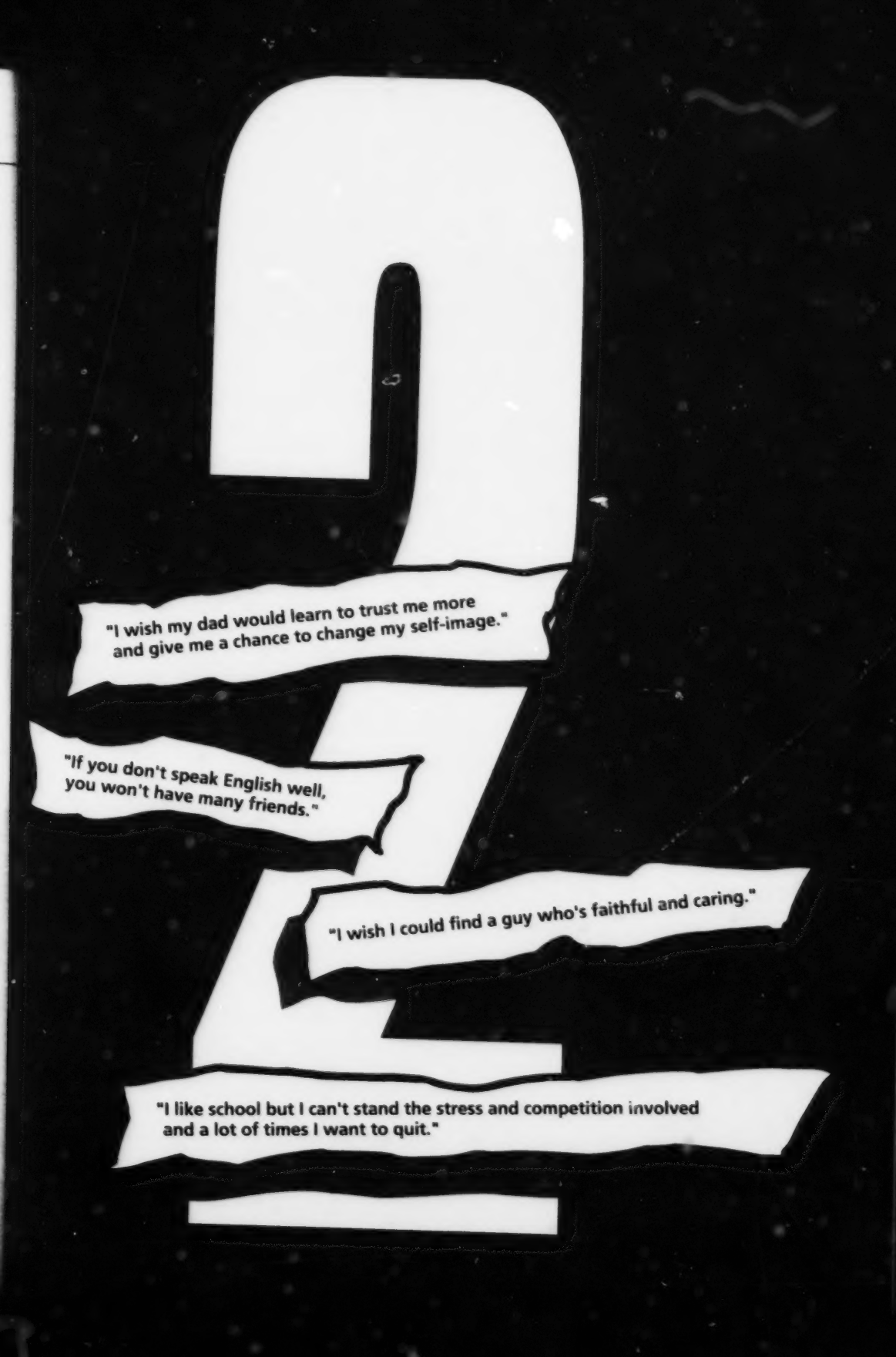
- ***appearance*: 95% of young women agree their appearance is important to them; only 13% are very satisfied with their appearance**
- ***health*: 41% of young women are very satisfied**
- ***sexual abuse*: 18% of the young women reported they had been sexually abused**
- ***stress*: 55% of young women agree they experience a great deal of stress**
- ***vulnerability*: 29% of young women feel at risk from physical and other types of abuse**

ENDNOTES: Chapter One

1. Marlene Mackie, *Constructing Women and Men: Gender Socialization* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1987), p. 149.
2. Feminist psychological literature, particularly that of the Stone Centre, has introduced important ideas about the development of the female self through its studies on knowledge, morality, and so on. These ideas are central to the CACSW study. Particularly important in that literature is the search for independence within relationships. See Mary Field Belenky et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976). See also Carol Gilligan, Nona P. Lyons, and Trudy J. Hanmer, *Making Connections: The Relational Worlds of Adolescent Girls at Emma Willard School* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).
3. Survey statistics have been rounded off to the nearest whole number.
4. In response to the same question, 78.6% of the young women surveyed by the Canadian Teachers' Federation agreed. See the Canadian Teachers' Federation, *A Cappella: A Report on the Realities, Concerns, Expectations and Barriers Experienced by Adolescent Women in Canada* (Ottawa: 1990), p. 11.
5. Mackie, *Constructing Women and Men*, p. 148. Many studies point out that women learn from cultural images that society values them only insofar as they conform to the impossible ideal of the flawless – and passive – "model" woman, as shown in commercial art, such as magazine advertisements. See Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (Toronto: Random House, 1990). See also Varda Burstyn, "Of Movies and Models: Girls in Hollywood", *Canadian Woman Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1982), p. 52; and Barbara A. White, *Growing Up Female: Adolescent Girlhood in American Fiction* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), p. 195.
6. Alan J.C. King et al., *Canada Youth and AIDS Study* (Kingston: Social Program Evaluation Group, Queen's University, 1988), p. 21.
7. Millicent Poole and Glen Evans, "Adolescents' Self-Perceptions of Competence in Life Skill Areas", *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1989), pp. 147-173.
8. Mackie, *Constructing Women and Men*, p. 148.
9. Suzanne Daley, "Self-Image in Girls Lower than Boys after Adolescence", *The Globe and Mail*, January 10, 1991, p. A15.
10. Charles Richman et al., "General and Specific Self-Esteem in Late Adolescent Students: Race, Gender, and SES Effects", *Adolescence*, vol. 20, no. 79 (1985), pp. 555-556.
11. For instance, psychologist Ruth Sidel found that young women surveyed agreed that "while ability and hard work are important, looks are still crucial" for success both in their personal lives and in the public sphere. See Ruth Sidel, *On Her Own: Growing Up in the Shadow of the American Dream* (New York: Viking Press, 1990), p. 113.
12. This finding does not necessarily contradict the 1990 Canadian Teachers' Federation study that found 85% of young women "worry a lot about how they look": they may be satisfied, and yet worried about their appearance. See Canadian Teachers' Federation, *A Cappella*, p. 11.
13. This is not to say that young women are not very concerned about body weight as well, as many other studies have shown. A 1990 study in Nova Scotia found that half the young women surveyed felt they were too fat. See the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, *Young Women in Nova Scotia: A Study of Attitudes, Behaviour and Aspirations* (Halifax: 1990), p. 45. Similarly, a U.S. study found that girls have been socialized to hate obesity by age five. See Gilligan, Lyons, and Hanmer, *Making Connections*, p. 168.
14. Sidel, *On Her Own*, p. 113.

15. Boys, on the other hand, associate poor health with physical concerns and tend to react with anti-social behaviour. See Cheryl Alexander, "Gender Differences in Adolescent Health Concerns and Self-Assessed Health", *Journal of Early Adolescence*, vol. 9, no. 4 (1989), pp. 467-479. See also Eric Ostrov et al., "Gender Differences in Adolescent Symptomatology: A Normative Study", *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, vol. 28, no. 3 (1989), pp. 394-398.
16. A 1987 study found that students' assessments of their health grow more positive when their performance in school improves and their participation in sports increases. See David Mechanic and Stephen Hansell, "Adolescent Competence, Psychological Well-Being, and Self-Assessed Physical Health", *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, vol. 28, no. 4 (1987), pp. 364-374.
17. Francis A.J. Ianni, *The Search for Structure: A Report on American Youth Today* (New York: Free Press, 1989), p. 247.
18. A 1985 study estimates that 14% of children are sexually molested. Robert Coles and Geoffrey Stokes, *Sex and the American Teenager* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), p. 11. See also Canada, Committee on Sexual Offences Against Children and Youths, *Sexual Offences Against Children: Report* (Badgley Report) (Ottawa: 1984).
19. Initially, four school jurisdictions objected to the survey question on sexual abuse. One ultimately agreed to administer it, with parental approval; the administrator suggested that seeking such approval was a waste of time, because abusive parents would probably not allow their children to fill out the questionnaire. The three others denied permission, although they agreed that sexual abuse was a difficult problem.
20. Sandra Butler, "The Politics of Sexual Assault: Facing the Challenge", in *Justice for Young Women: Close-Up on Critical Issues*, Sue Davidson, ed. (Tucson: New Directions for Young Women, 1982), p. 99.
21. See Butler, "The Politics of Sexual Assault", *ibid.*, p. 108.
Family sexual abuse is one of the reasons many young people run away from home. A survey of a Toronto shelter showed 73% of the female runaways and 38% of the young men there had been abused by their families. See Arlene McCormack et al., "Runaway Youths and Sexual Victimization: Gender Differences in an Adolescent Runaway Population", *Child Abuse and Neglect*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1986), pp. 387-395. Abuse victims of both sexes are more likely to report anxiety and suicidal feelings than are young people who have not been abused.
A study of a New York shelter showed roughly the same figures. See Jane Levine Powers et al., "Maltreatment among Runaway and Homeless Youth", *Child Abuse and Neglect*, vol. 14, no. 1 (1990), pp. 87-98.
22. It is difficult to find out what percentage of young people who reported abuse had been abused by family members. One sample of pregnant teenagers found that 10.6% had been sexually abused at home. See Patricia Donaldson et al., "Teen Pregnancy and Sexual Abuse: Exploring the Connection", *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, vol. 59, no. 3 (1989), pp. 289-300.
23. See Monique Massie and Shirley Johnson, "The Importance of Recognizing a History of Sexual Abuse in Female Adolescents", *Journal of Adolescent Health Care*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1989), pp. 184-191.
24. Adela Yarcheski et al., "Stressors and Ways of Coping in Mid-Adolescent Girls", *The Canadian Journal of Nursing Research*, vol. 22, n. 3 (1990), pp. 67-78.
25. See Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982). See also Belenky et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing*, and Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*.

26. Similarly, a New York study found that 96% of young women surveyed expected to work for pay once out of school. See Leigh A. Leslie, "The Impact of Adolescent Females' Assessment of Parenthood and Employment on Plans for the Future", *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, vol. 15, no. 1 (1986), p. 37.
27. Gilligan, *In A Different Voice*, p. 234.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
29. Maureen Baker, *"What Will Tomorrow Bring?..." A Study of the Aspirations of Adolescent Women* (Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1985), pp. 101-103.
30. Mackie, *Constructing Women and Men*, p. 149.
31. Sidel, *On Her Own*, p. 73.
32. See Dormer Ellis and Lyz Sayer, *When I Grow Up: Career Expectations and Aspirations of Canadian Schoolchildren* (Ottawa: Women's Bureau, Labour Canada, 1986), p. 56.
33. *Ibid.*


"I wish my dad would learn to trust me more and give me a chance to change my self-image."
"If you don't speak English well, you won't have many friends."
"I wish I could find a guy who's faithful and caring."
"I like school but I can't stand the stress and competition involved and a lot of times I want to quit."

How do young women view the people and institutions that affect them most directly: their families, their friends, their schools?[1] How do adolescent women relate to them? How do they want to relate to them? The parts of young people's immediate worlds are all interdependent, and each contributes to their transformation to adulthood.

Young women's concerns, interests, and priorities are in many ways different from those offered by the cultural stereotypes of "the teenager". For instance, strong family ties emerge as the top priority for both young women and young men in their relationships with others. Young women are also far less preoccupied with boyfriends than the "teenage-girl" stereotype suggests, giving higher priority to friends, family, and school. As well, achievement in school ranks high as a priority with young people of both sexes.

The immediate world of young women consists of intense but conflicted relationships with school, friends, and families.

FAMILIES

My Family is Important to Me

Repeatedly, young women express a yearning for close, strong family relationships. Over 90% of young women agree that their families are important to them; this percentage includes the 70% who **strongly agree**. Families are similarly important to young men, with 89% agreeing. While the importance of the family for young women remains constant with age, for young men it decreases: 10% fewer 16-year-olds than 13-year-olds say their family is important to them.[2]

However, young women are less satisfied with their family relationships than are young men. Despite the great importance they attach to the family, only 45% of young women say they are **very satisfied** with their family relationships, compared to 52% of young men. About 16% of young women say they are dissatisfied, but only 10% of young men are dissatisfied.

For both sexes, satisfaction decreases 7% with age. At age 13, 87% of the girls and 92% of the boys are satisfied; at age 16, those

"I'd change parents, or at least I'd make sure that they understand me and that we talk once in a while. But now... it's too late."

"I would try to get along with my parents better when I'm in a bad mood."

"I would buy my mom her dream house and my father a large land ..."

percentages decrease to 80% and to 85%, respectively. In short, at age 16, young women seem to be less satisfied with their family life, even though it is more important to them than to 16-year-old men. This finding holds true for all regions of the country.

Changing Family Relationships

About 90% of young women agree that their family is important to them, including 70% who strongly agree.

Slightly fewer young women are satisfied with their family life than are young men.

What do young women feel they need in family relationships? How would they improve them? What do they see as the obstacles to the strong family ties they seek?

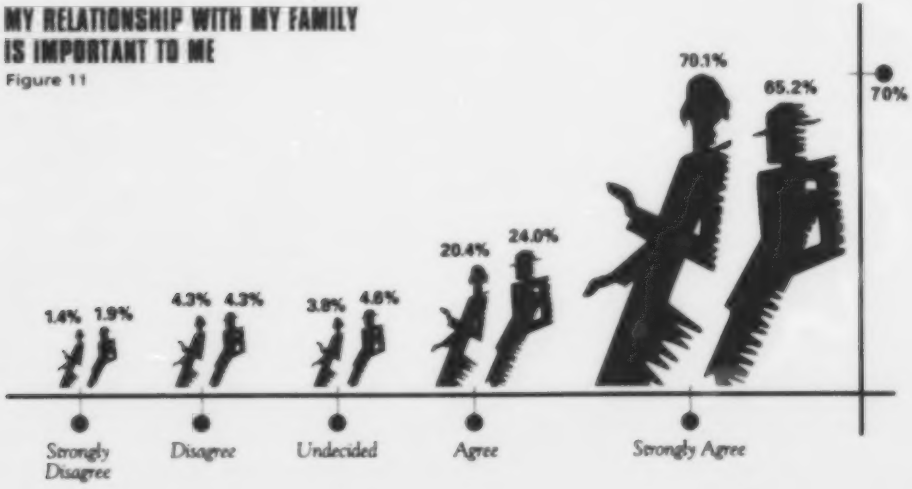
Many of the young women talked about their family relationships in their answers to the open-ended questions. Their replies are revealing clues both to the problems they encounter in the family and to the solutions they seek.

Many worried that their families did not understand them, making comments such as, "I would like more mental support from my family", and, "Try to make your parents understand what is going on because they don't."

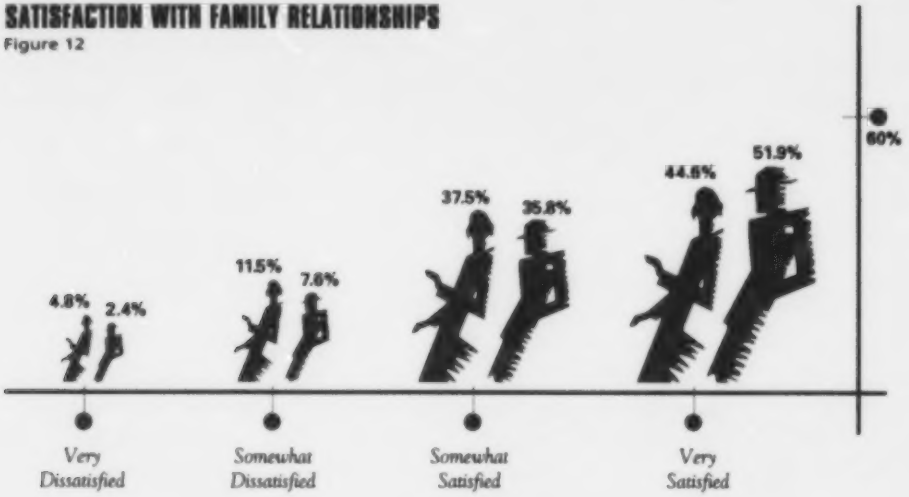
Others wanted to change their own behaviour. "I would try to get along with my parents better when I'm in a bad mood. (I mean I take it out on them.)", wrote one 13-year-old. A 14-year-old wished she could be "more honest and truthful to family and loved ones", while another wanted to "be more helpful at home".

MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MY FAMILY IS IMPORTANT TO ME

Figure 11



SATISFACTION WITH FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS
Figure 12



A 14-year-old girl was torn between her need to set her own goals as an independent person and her desire for close communication with her parents. Her answer was written in red ink; asterisks and arrows punctuated her reply as it filled the pages.

> *"I'd change parents, or at least I'd make sure that they understand me and that we talk once in a while. But now ... it's too late.*
>
> *They hate me because I'm not the daughter they hoped for. They wanted an intellectual who thinks only of school, and they got a daughter who wants to live life to the fullest.*
>
> *I'd want to meet someone (a psychologist or someone else) who could help me with my parents, or better yet who could meet with them to open their eyes.*
>
> *I'd like to meet someone who had problems with their parents to know how they got out of it. How did you find yourself in these difficult years?"*

For this young woman, the presence and attention of her parents were compelling issues in her life. Statistics in this and other studies indicate that she is not alone: young people count heavily on adults for information, support, and guidance.[3]

In turn, children offer parent(s) their energy and concern; far from being immersed solely in their own worlds, they worry about their

parents' health, economic worries, and aging.[4] Describing changes she would make in her world, one 16-year-old wrote, "I would buy my mom her dream house and my father a large land upon which to build a store to his liking and way of life."

"Try to make your parents understand what is going on because they don't."

"I worry about my dad's job. He works at the post office and Canada Post is contracting out and privatizing. Dad may lose his job."

"Young people need their parents to listen to them, even if they are a little tired."

Many of them wished they could improve working conditions for their parent(s). A 15-year-old said she would change "the amount of money my parents get paid – it would have to be higher because they deserve it and need the money for 3 kids." A 13-year-old enthusiastically hoped, "Parents Bissness Would Boom!!!"

Several were concerned about political and social issues that affected their parent(s). One young woman said she was worried "about discrimination because mom can't find a job that will pay enough." Another wrote, "I worry about my dad's job. He works at the post office and Canada Post is contracting out and privatizing. Dad may lose his job."

Others had different concerns on their minds. One adolescent wrote, "I would take my dad's disease, epilepsy, away from him." Another simply wrote, "I want my mom back. (She died.)"

Confused or concerned, angry or content, young women and young men alike felt strongly about their families: clearly, the opinions of their parent(s) mattered deeply to them. "I wish my dad would learn to trust me more and give me a chance to change my self-image", wrote a 13-year-old.

It seems that parent(s) who bemoan their children's lack of interest in them are wrong more often than not. Indeed, some of the replies indicate that many young people feel it is the other way around, and it is they who are striving to make contact. "Young people need their parents to listen to them, even if they **are** a little tired", wrote one 16-year-old.

UNPAID WORK

Young women and young men report roughly the same number of hours of unpaid work at home, with older adolescents working a little more than younger ones. In the survey, "unpaid work" includes everything from work in the house to work in the yard, babysitting, and helping out in the family business. Young men report working slightly more than do young women, with 6.1 hours of unpaid work compared to 5.6 hours for young women. These figures do not vary significantly across the country.

Some studies indicate that girls learn to attach more importance to household tasks than boys do, relating to them in ways that boys do not. Although they may put in as much time working without pay at home, studies show that young men's experience of household work does not prepare them well to be partners in their own households later.[5] Adult women spend far more time on household tasks than do adult men.[6]

Young women spend slightly less time doing unpaid household work than do young men: about 5.6 hours a week, compared to 6.1 hours for young men.

Unfortunately, it was beyond the scope of this survey to investigate gender divisions of household tasks.[7] Nor was it possible to compare the attitudes of the young men and young women to unpaid work, as they were asked only what hours they worked, not how they felt about it.

FRIENDSHIP

Young women move among families and friends, developing a growing sense of self in their relationships with their peers. Friendship and its commitments are deeply meaningful to young women. From their replies to the closed-ended statements, and from their commentaries, it is clear that they count on their friends for much more than the sense of conformity they are often said to pursue. Adolescent women turn to friends for the same kind of support they say they need from their families. They want to speak out, to be heard, to counter what one 14-year-old described as "the fear that nobody is going to be around when you really need someone to talk to and confide in."

Young women's responses to the open-ended question about their concerns show how pervasive their feelings are about both friends and families. Asked what concerns they had, almost 40% of those who listed specific relationships spoke about their friends, with concerns about parental and family relationships roughly 5% higher, at about 45%. By contrast, only 17% of young women listed boyfriends as a concern.[8]

The extent of satisfaction with friendships was, however, significantly higher than with families. Ninety-two per cent said they were satisfied with their friendships, compared to 82% who were satisfied with their family relationships. Over half of the young women described themselves as **very satisfied** with their friendships, and 7% were **dissatisfied**; twice as many were **dissatisfied** with their family relationships.

Other research contains similar findings. In the 1988 Canadian Youth Federation survey, both sexes listed friendship as the highest of their goals and named friendship as their greatest source of enjoyment.[9]

Creating Connections

Young women consider friends very important, despite the conflicts that friendships imply.[10] Many of the young women wrote that they were afraid of losing friends, having no friends, not having the "right" friends, or not having enough friends.

Over 90% of young women are satisfied with their friendships.

Twice as many young women are dissatisfied with their family relationships as they are with their friendships.

Only 17% of the young women who worry about relationships listed boyfriends as a concern.

"My friends treat me like I am a left-over", wrote one young woman, after saying she would like to "pick my friends better". A 16-year-old observed, "If you don't speak English well, you won't have many friends." Another wrote that young women "especially feel the need to be able to fit in and be a part of the popular crowd."

Peer Pressure

Peer pressure was one of the young women's worries. It emerged in the open-ended question asking them to list their concerns, problems, and fears; they were anxious about friends' expectations, about pressures to try drugs, alcohol, and sex.

One 15-year-old felt she needed to change her appearance in order to be accepted: "... if you're not nice-looking you are left out." Another young woman wrote that she "would try to choose friends who would be a better influence on me." A 14-year-old worried, "I sometimes feel that I use people to try and get popular, though I never mentally hurt anyone", resolving to "try and not use people" in the future.

Peer pressure was raised as a topic more often by 13-year-olds than by 16-year-olds. Young people's desire for conformity to a crowd tends to decrease with age, as friendships gradually become established and thus more secure. Other researchers suggest that urban teenagers feel a stronger need to belong to "a crowd" than do young people in rural areas.[11]

Despite its difficulty, friendship leads to opportunities for growth, contributing to the creation of order at the personal and social levels and helping a person find a meaningful place in the world.[12] The peer group is not an isolated setting. Teenagers live in social networks of adults and adolescents. Peers and parent(s) often have a lot in common, including their social, economic, religious, and

educational backgrounds; thus, peers may reinforce parental values. Furthermore, adolescents' interactions with peers often focus on subjects such as music and fashions, while family interactions concern moral and social values and understandings of the adult world.[13]

Peer pressure worries 13-year-olds more than 16-year-olds, who are more secure in their friendships.

Some research suggests that young women tend to be more willing to follow peers in neutral rather than in anti-social activities.[14] They resist pressure for misconduct; they fear that if they misbehave, both parent(s) and friends will feel badly.[15] None of this is to suggest that creating friendship is easy, or that the lure of peer pressure is not hard to resist. The young women's responses indicate that they are very much aware of this.

Adolescents are rarely isolated with people of their own age, even though it may appear so at times. They seek ways of defining their individuality. But they are also, with peers and friends, seeking transitional relationships to provide connections to the larger society. They simultaneously inhabit the realms of adults and peers.

Such findings contradict the popular perception that young women's intense ties to friends lead to delinquency, conformity, and consumerism. Adolescents themselves simply say they like being with their friends, like being understood, and enjoy the openness and spontaneity of friendship – clearly positive values to move them into the public world.[16] Among friends, they are not isolated in individualism, but connected to a social context.

"I sometimes feel that I use people to try and get popular, though I never mentally hurt anyone."

" ... if you're not nice-looking you are left out."

Boyfriends

Of those who mentioned relationships as a concern in the open-ended questions, only 17% talked specifically about boyfriends. As this relatively low percentage indicates, fewer young women felt concerned about the opposite sex than were concerned about relationships with friends and families. Their comments were often rather casual, such as, "I wish I was going out with Jamie", "I want a boyfriend", and "I want my mum to like my boyfriends".

Of course, there were exceptions. One 14-year-old was so single-minded about her boyfriend that her comments were almost a parody of society's image of the "boy-crazy" teenage girl:

> ***"I wish everyone would leave me and my boyfriend alone ... All I want in this world is him. He's the best thing***

that happened to me ... I'm going to spend the summer with him, maybe I might not come back. All we want is to be together. He can support me."

However, comments such as these were surprisingly rare. Barely 20% of those who said they would like to make changes in certain relationships mentioned their boyfriends; by contrast, 62% wanted to change family relationships (two-thirds of these referred to their parent(s)), and 18% were worried about friends. So pervasive is heterosexism that very few young women, even in the anonymity of the questionnaire, raised the subject of homosexuality and gay relationships.

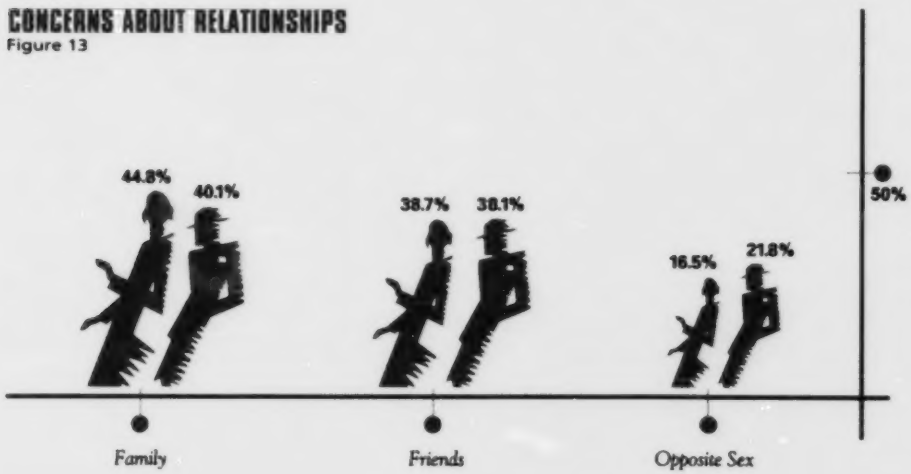
"I would change that I was cheated on by my boyfriend and best friend, and I would change that I was raped."

"I would like to change my boyfriend's problems."

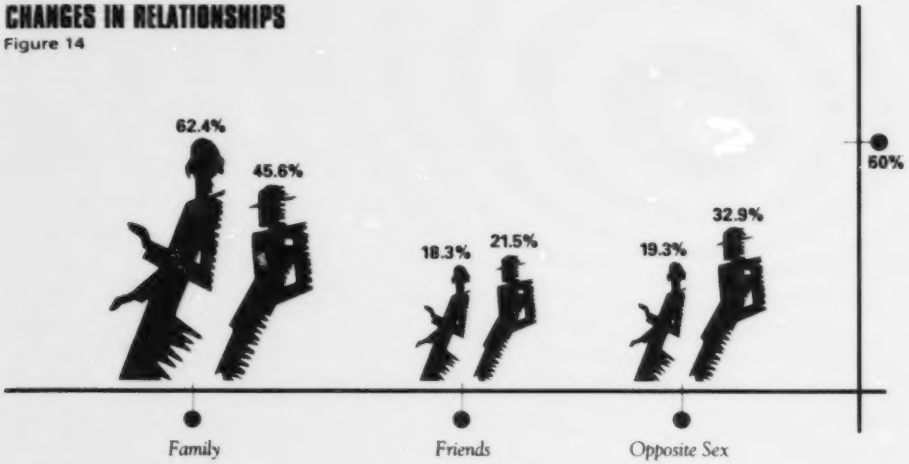
Young women are more concerned about their connections than are young men. Thirty-two per cent of young women identify relationships with their families, friends, and the opposite sex as something they would change, in comparison to only 18% of young men. Furthermore, those who identify these specific relationships, only 20% of young women, compared to 33% of young men, refer to changing relationships involving the opposite sex.

Young women's comments often focused on their sense of powerlessness and their desire for improved relations with boyfriends. "I would change that I was cheated on by my boyfriend and best friend", wrote one young woman, "and I would change that I was raped." They also sought to nurture them. One worried, "I would like to change my boyfriend's problems." Another wrote, wistfully, "I wish I could find a guy who's faithful and caring."

CONCERNS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS
Figure 13



CHANGES IN RELATIONSHIPS
Figure 14



Others wrote of their abhorrence of fighting with their boyfriends, and worried about what they could do to smooth out problems with them. "In my personal life I would try to work out my problems with my boyfriend", resolved one young woman. Another wrote, "I would marry my boyfriend and never fight with him again."

When writing about their girlfriends, young men focused on strikingly different concerns. Some were preoccupied with sex, worrying about "dying a virgin", "not getting any sex by sixteen", and "dating a nun".

Asked what changes they would make about their lives, some young men said they would like to have "better looking girls around", "more sex, more babes". Other comments included wishes for "lots of women", "more beautiful women", or "plenty of girlfriends". One 14-year-old said he wanted to "have a playboy playmate as my girlfriend."

Young women are less concerned about their boyfriends than vice versa.

While some young women worry about fighting with their boyfriends, some young men worry about "not getting any sex".

Reflections on emotional ties to girlfriends were far less numerous. Few of them echoed the wish of a 14-year-old who wanted "to have a girlfriend who accepts me for what I am and understands me", or that of a 15-year-old who wrote, "I'd like to have a relationship with a girl I like."

Feelings about Sex

Sex is a relatively low priority for the young women who responded to the CACSW survey. Other researchers have also reached the same conclusion. For example, one study found that, in group

discussions, young women are much less animated about sex than about topics such as the desire to be part of a group or the need to get good grades.[17]

Previous research suggests young women seem less interested in sex because, while images invoking sex are found everywhere in the culture, it is still not considered appropriate for young women to take control of their sexual lives. For example, findings from the study cited above showed that if girls are asked if they have sex, they say they do. But when asked if they are sexually active, they say they are not. Researcher Ruth Sidel concludes that young women "may well see themselves as passive participants in occasional sex rather than as active participants ..."[18]

Young women who do not think of themselves as active partners when they have sex also tend not to plan for birth control or safer sex.

In that sense, sexually active young women may be doing just what our culture expects them to do: they acquiesce, they remain passive. Although they participate in sex, they may not be as emotionally involved in it as they are in matters such as school and friendship, over which they feel they have more control.

The consequences of this sense of powerlessness can be devastating. Sidel says the detachment it causes prevents women from planning for the consequences of being sexually active.[19] Combined with this sense of detachment are all the cultural cues that suggest no planning is called for in the first place. As Faye Wattleton, president of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, points out, television characters are routinely shown having sex without discussing it, considering its risks, or using birth control.[20]

These two factors may explain the magical thinking which so frustrates birth control and AIDS educators. The illusion of invincibility may not be a function of young women's ignorance, but a form of compensation for the powerlessness they feel in male-female relationships – an illusion that is constantly being reinforced by cultural messages.

Sexuality and Violence

Their sense of powerlessness is most acute in situations where force is used against women. A study in Scarborough, Ontario high schools found that one in four women had had sex physically or verbally forced upon them by their dates; one in seven men said they had forced their dates to have sex with them.[21]

Although a majority of the students in the Scarborough study said they disagreed with the use of force, young men were two to three times more likely to "excuse" it than were young women. Twenty per cent of the young men said they were unsure whether women liked being forced to have sex. Young women who had been forced said that they did not like it, but feared losing their boyfriends if they didn't comply.

Sex and Self-esteem

Young women's powerlessness in relationships is harmful to them. They are all too often unable to defend themselves from the use of force and from the risks of intercourse, such as unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. How can this feeling of powerlessness be countered?

Young women are more likely to practise safer sex as they grow older and more self-assured.

Sexuality education programs work better when combined with programs to build self-esteem.

Young women's self-esteem requires social validation.

Previous studies suggest that developing a higher self-esteem is crucial to changing young women's sense of detachment about their sexual lives. For instance, AIDS researchers have found that educational programs encouraging young women to practise safer sex are most effective when accompanied by programs that help build self-esteem. Researchers concluded that AIDS prevention projects must offer personal support and empowerment strategies as well as education programs.[22] However, such programs cannot limit themselves to personal and psychological interventions; they must also actively work to improve women's status.

Changes in the way young women approach sex as they grow older also suggest that building self-esteem is the key to reversing this sense of detachment. Researchers have found that, as they grow older and more secure, young women buy and use condoms more often, and become more at ease in discussing them.[23] They attribute this change in part to the fact that self-esteem increases between the ages of 13 and 23, as adolescents gain both more responsibilities and more privileges.[24]

Adult women and men are re-thinking power arrangements. Young women need their encouragement in gaining a greater sense of mastery over their lives. Young women are not confident about their place in the world. In the case of sexuality, low self-esteem creates a sort of double jeopardy for young women, compared to young men. As reported in Chapter One, young women are less confident than are young men. At the same time, that low self-esteem makes them all the more vulnerable to risks that particularly affect young women: sexual violence and unwanted pregnancy.

In sexuality, as in other areas, it is clear that a strong sense of self – confidence, not arrogance – serves young people well. And it is also clear that, in this respect, young women are at a great disadvantage compared to young men.

SCHOOLS

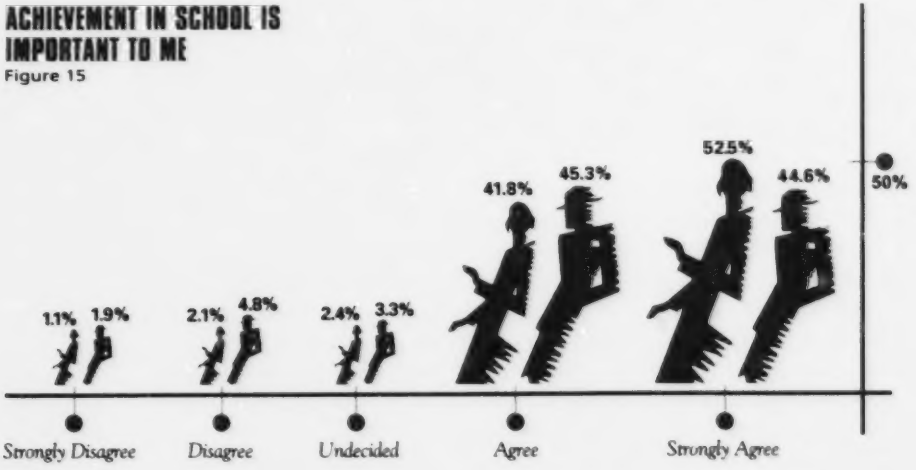
The CACSW survey findings show that school matters very much to both sexes. Indeed, it ranks as one of their top priorities. Still, worries about stress, competition, and failure come up often in their commentaries. Some students show an awareness of social injustices within the schools. The survey results also reveal clear differences between the ways young women and young men feel about school, as well as some regional differences.

The survey did not reach young people who had dropped out of school. Their reasons for leaving, as well as their outlook on school, would help elaborate on the image of school as seen through young people's eyes; future studies must seek to understand the motivations and experiences of this large population.

Achievement in School is Important to Me; I Like School

A 94% majority of young women say doing well in school is important to them – but only 66% say they like school, with 10% **strongly agreeing**. Young men enjoy school even less: only 52% say they like it.[25]

ACHIEVEMENT IN SCHOOL IS IMPORTANT TO ME
Figure 15



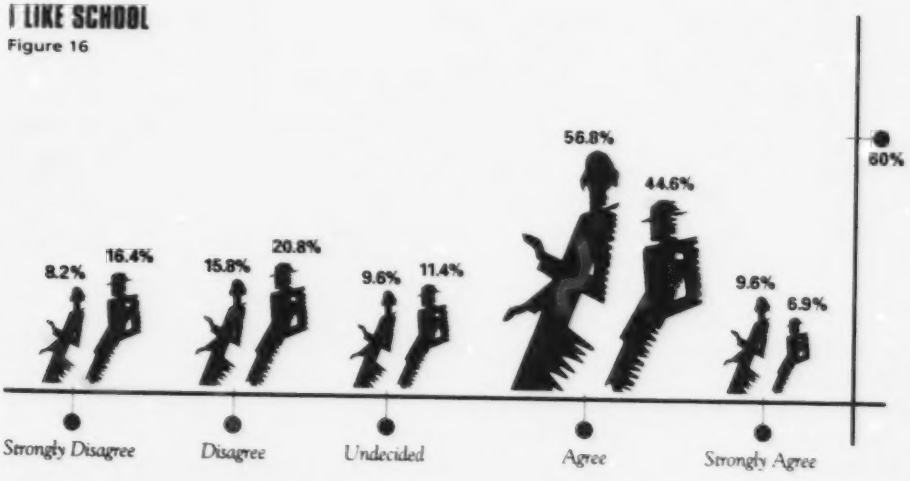
Regional differences also emerge from the survey findings. Québécois students like school least, although achievement in school is more important to them than to students in any other region. They are also the least satisfied with their achievement in school. By contrast, students in Ontario like school more than in any other region, and are more satisfied with their achievement.[25]

School Work

Almost 60% of young women say they spend five or six hours a week doing homework – only 44% of the young men do the same number of hours. Just 8% of young women, in comparison to 16% of young men, do only one hour of homework a week.

Young women also spend more time reading for pleasure and personal interest than do young men: 70% of them say they read three hours or more a week, compared to 43% of young men. Fully 14% of young men say they do not read outside of school at all; this is true for only 6% of young women.

I LIKE SCHOOL
Figure 16



Distress in the Schools

It is clear from young people's responses that school matters greatly to them. They are very much aware of the importance of doing well – but they find school a difficult place to be. School ranks third on the list of issues young women name as concerns; it is the second-greatest concern for young men. In the list of

changes they wish they could make, school ranks ninth for young women, and fifth for young men.

Doing well in school is important to 94% of young women – but only 66% like school.

What is it that makes school so difficult and uncomfortable for young people? The commentaries in the open-ended section of the survey reveal some of the main sources of difficulty. Many of the students worried intensely about their own performance in school. One 15-year-old wrote,

> *"I like school but I can't stand the stress and competition involved and a lot of times I want to quit. I get good grades and am expected to be brilliant. I don't quite know what to do about it."*

Many students worry about failing, "getting booted out of schools", and "becoming a bum".

School ranks third on the list of issues young women name as concerns; it is the second-greatest concern for young men.

Another young woman was concerned about "the stress of school and the pressure that we get from parents and teachers." Many, many others were anxious because they needed to get good grades, "do well in school"; they worried about "getting booted out of schools", not being accepted into university, and "becoming a bum". They agonized about working harder, trying harder, striving "to get better marks and please myself along with my family."

Students were acutely aware of being in competition with other students. "I would change the discriminating attitudes of students who feel they are superior", wrote one respondent. This anxiety is all the greater for students who are aware of competing not just within their own schools, but with students in schools across the country.

Teachers "take advantage of their authority, pick on kids."

"I would change the amount of education I am receiving compared to that of how much education mainland students are receiving."

One 16-year-old wrote that she wished she could change "the amount of education I am receiving compared to ... how much education mainland students are receiving." She worried, too, about the lack of opportunities she and her fellow students would face after school, saying she wished she could change "the economy of Newfoundland ... the future of this province."

Others pointed to poor student-teacher relationships, writing about "how difficult it is to have a good relationship with teachers." Teachers "take advantage of their authority, pick on kids", wrote one young woman.

Some saw this not as a personal matter but as a sign of a flawed or failing school system. Teachers "are always angry and some of them take it out on their students", wrote one student, saying she "would like to change the way teachers treat us today". Another

simply wondered, "Will our environment in school slowly decrease and become worse?" They were concerned for others. "I would try to educate as many people as possible to help them do something with their lives", wrote one young woman.

Discrimination in Schools

■ ***Minority groups***

Some students were aware of discrimination within the school system. Over a quarter of the students agreed that "minority groups are discriminated against in my school"; roughly the same number were **undecided**.

Many wished for an end to discrimination. One 16-year-old, for instance, wanted "peace between students at school who have been brought in in a prejudiced sort of way but go to an interracial school." Another hoped to change "my relationship with the Indians in my school", while another was curious about the Ku Klux Klan: "I'd love to see what those sick people are like!"

Over a quarter of young people feel there is discrimination against minorities in the schools, and a quarter are undecided.

Over 90% of young women say they have the same opportunities in school as young men.

However, some students held quite different beliefs. One student suggested "there should be a school for whites only." Another was angry "that Indians have treaty cards. It sucks." Although these types of comments and opinions were the exception rather than the rule, they demonstrate the need for research on discrimination against minority groups in schools throughout Canada.

Schools need to militate against discrimination, not only in rhetoric but also in the examples they actively set for their students in classrooms and administrative offices. Such schools will be more likely to promote an inclusive, heterogeneous society than those which merely offer lessons on multiculturalism.

■ ***Gender Inequality in Schools***

An overwhelming majority of students of both sexes say young people have an equal opportunity to succeed in school, with 94% of young women and 93% of young men agreeing they do. Other studies have also found that only a small minority of young people are aware of inequality of opportunity for women.[27]

Awareness of gender discrimination increases with age among young women. About 96% of the 13-year-old girls and boys agree they have equal chances of success in school. That figure

decreases by 7% for young women at age 16, compared to a slight 2% decrease among 16-year-old men.

Here again, some regional differences are apparent. Young women in Quebec are most likely to say they **strongly agree** that young women have the same opportunities to succeed in school as do young men; young women in British Columbia and the Prairies are least likely to **strongly agree**.

Where Do Schools Go from Here?

The CACSW survey results point to some disturbing trends in school systems in Canada. Many students have great difficulties in school; given the high value students of both sexes place on academic achievement, this cannot be attributed solely to an unwillingness to learn. On the contrary, it seems their eagerness to do well is a source of anxiety; the stress of competition and adults' expectations are recurring themes in the students' responses.

A recent survey suggests that schools may actually lower the self-esteem of their students.[28] Other researchers have found that schools rate students too often as "not good enough", making them feel inadequate and out of place in school.[29] As one researcher put it, some schools are "all too often training many of their young people for a life of failure and despair".[30]

Young women fully understand the importance of schools for their lives, but are uncomfortable in that environment. Certainly, peers encourage each other to do well in school[31]; certainly, students value education and learning, realizing their importance in their lives; certainly, they are often motivated by their teachers.[32] But when they are too often assessed as "not good enough", their perceptions of themselves diminish or falter.

Researchers and educators have often urged that schools free themselves of rigidity. They have called for new ways of thinking, teaching, and acting. Young people's responses show how important such change is to them.[33]

Could schools reshape themselves to invoke less fear and less stress? They tend all too often to reinforce social class and racial, ethnic, and gender hierarchies. Could they instead militate against them, becoming places where people learn about themselves in all their diversity, in safety and security, and with the hope of personal success?

A LONGING FOR COMMUNITY

A recurring theme in young women's responses when asked about their "immediate world" is a yearning for a sense of community. Family and friendship ties are important to them. They feel a strong need to be close to the people around them at home, with friends, or at school; they cherish intimacy.

Young people generate ideas and identities, either in harmony or in conflict with the values around them, but not independently of them. Young women deeply desire that the family setting, their first community, be harmonious. "I wish for me and my brother to understand each other and get along", wrote a 13-year-old. Another said, "I wish that I could agree with my parents more."

For young women, sociability is essential. Other research indicates that they spend a great deal of time in social interaction. They spend more time talking than boys do; their conversation is often about interpersonal relations. Their television-watching consists of the social dramas of soap operas and game shows; they spend twice the amount of time interacting with their friends as boys do.[34] They desire connections with their families, with other adults and with friends, as well as with their schools. If young women's futures include power and the capacity to act in the public sphere, that sphere may come to look less individualistic, more communal.

If our culture did not consider their age and gender – and their powerlessness – as the most important characteristics of young women, as they themselves cautioned us frequently not to do in their comments, they would more easily find the sense of community they long for. The institutions they inhabit could feel more their own.

One young woman wrote, "I would want to have me and my family all together again. I'd want someone to love me, the way that I love them." The people she would invite to speak or visit at her school, she wrote, would be "[a]nyone who is willing to come and to talk to us (and who really cares)." When asked what questions she would put to people her age, she wrote, "How do you feel about yourself and about your past? How are you willing to get along in the future? Do you have self-confidence and do you have anyone to talk to about your problems?" She added a note to her questionnaire: "Thank you for listening to the younger people. Thank you again", and she signed it, "The Unknown." This young woman articulately voiced an awareness of the serious threat to her identity created by alienation and isolation.

SUMMARY

A strong majority of young women are satisfied with their immediate relationships. Both young women and young men are the most content with their friendships, although many say they would change such things as the way they interact with them and the way they deal with peer pressure.

Young women are less preoccupied with boyfriends than media stereotypes of adolescents suggest. In fact, they mention families and school more frequently than boyfriends. Young men are more preoccupied with the opposite sex than are young women. Family ties are equally important to both young women and young men; however, young women are less satisfied with their family relationships than are young men.

Academic achievement is very important to both sexes. However, many young women find school far from satisfying; young men are even less satisfied. A large percentage of both sexes feel that young women and young men have equal opportunities to succeed in school. They also find that there is discrimination against minorities in the schools.

GLANCE-BOX

YOUNG WOMEN AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

- **family is important: 91% agree**
- **family relationships are satisfying to 82%**
- **friendships are satisfying to 92%**

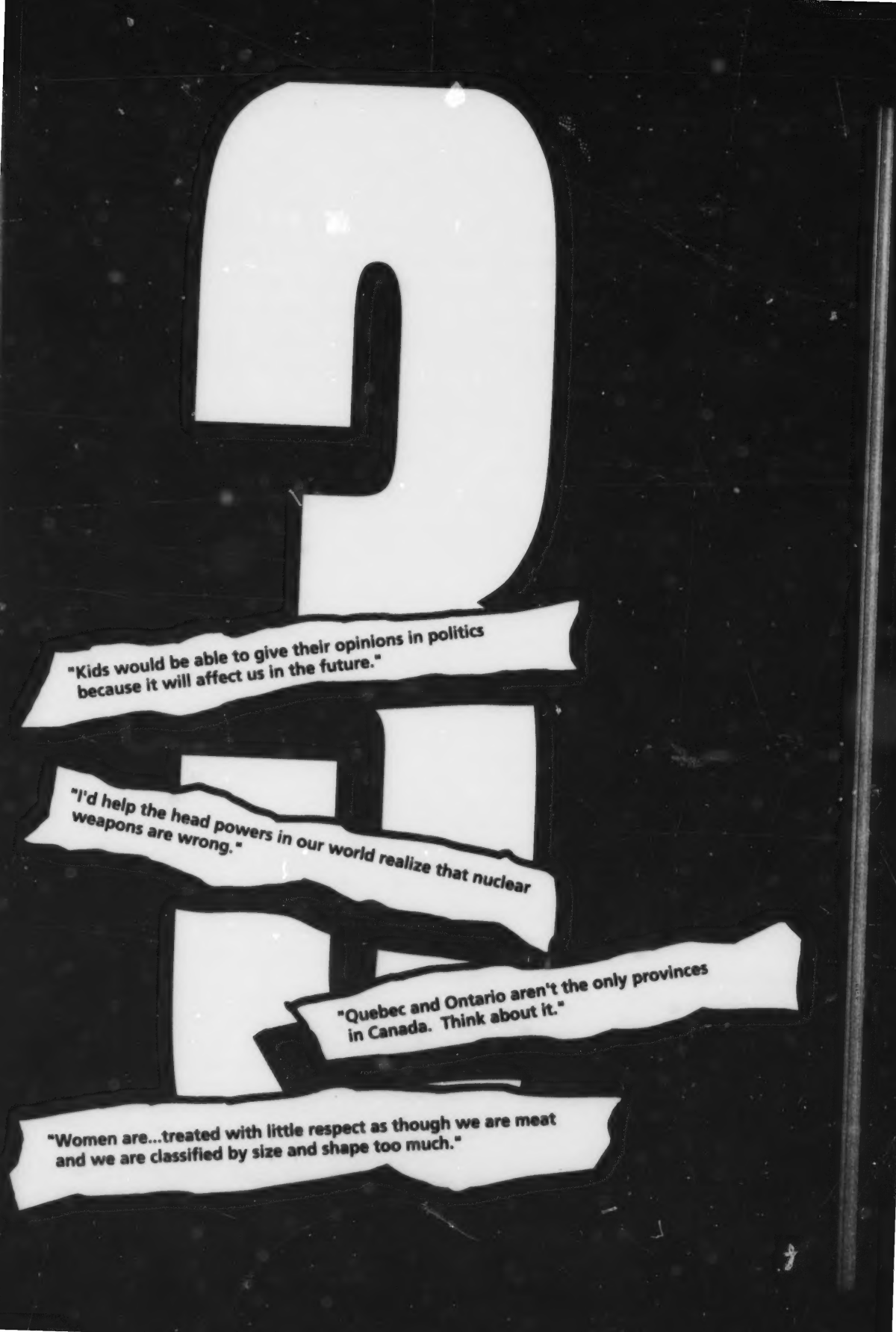
YOUNG WOMEN AND SCHOOL

- **achievement is important: 94% agree**
- **satisfied with achievement: 79% agree**
- **"I like school": 66% agree**
- **discrimination against minority groups exists: 25% agree; 25% are undecided**
- **both sexes have equal opportunity to succeed: 94% agree**

ENDNOTES: Chapter Two

1. School is included in this section because of the great importance the young women in the CACSW survey attached to it in their responses. Other studies have suggested that school has as powerful an impact on young people's futures as do parents. Schools are the institutions which more than any other bring their students from the world of intimacy toward the public world. See Francis A.J. Ianni, *The Search for Structure: A Report on American Youth Today* (New York: Free Press, 1989), p. 102.
2. On the importance to young people of family ties, see also Carol Gilligan, Nona P. Lyons, and Trudy J. Hanmer, *Making Connections: The Relational Worlds of Adolescent Girls at Emma Willard School* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 111.
3. See Mihaly Czikszentmihalyi and Reed Larson, *Being Adolescent: Conflict and Growth in the Teenage Years* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), p. 276. See also Jerome Kagan and Robert Coles, eds., *Twelve to Sixteen: Early Adolescence* (New York: Norton, 1972), p. 103.
4. Ruth Sidel, *On Her Own: Growing Up in the Shadow of the American Dream* (New York: Viking Press, 1990), p. 49.
5. Maryse Richards and Reed Larson, "The Life Space and Socialization of the Self: Sex Differences in the Young Adolescent", *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, vol. 18, no. 6 (1989), p. 624.
6. See Marlene Mackie, *Constructing Women and Men: Gender Socialization* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1987).
7. One study concluded that household work is divided by gender in most households. See Raymond Montemayor and John R. Brownlee, "Fathers, Mothers, and Adolescents: Gender-based Differences in Parental Roles during Adolescence", *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1987), pp. 281-291.
8. A further 13% listed unspecified relationships ("people", for example) as a concern. This group has been set aside from the "relationships" category in this chapter in order to focus on parent(s), friends, and boyfriends. See Tables 1 and 2 in Chapter Four which include all references to "relationships".
9. See Canadian Youth Foundation, *Canada's Youth: Ready for Today: A Comprehensive Survey of 15-24 Year Olds* (Ottawa: 1988), pp. 8 and 10. Although friends are highly important to both sexes, research suggests that young women are more committed to friendship than are young men, not because of gender but because of gender roles learned in the family. See Catherine Cooper and Harold Grotevant, "Gender Issues in the Interface of Family Experience and Adolescents' Friendship and Dating Identity", *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1987), p. 254.
10. Research suggests that the importance of having close friends grows over time. See Czikszentmihalyi and Larson, *Being Adolescent*, p. 155.
11. Bradford B. Brown et al., "The Importance of Peer Group ("Crowd") Affiliation in Adolescence", *Journal of Adolescence*, vol. 9 (1986), pp. 73-96.
12. Czikszentmihalyi and Larson, *Being Adolescent*, p. 157.
13. John Janeway Conger, "A World They Never Knew", in *Twelve to Sixteen: Early Adolescence*, Jerome Kagan and Robert Coles, eds. (New York: Norton, 1972), p. 221.
14. Bradford B. Brown et al., "Perceptions of Peer Pressure, Peer Conformity Dispositions, and Self-Reported Behaviour among Adolescents", *Developmental Psychology*, vol. 22, no. 4 (1986), pp. 521-530.
15. Ruth Pearl et al., "Resisting or Acquiescing to Peer Pressure to Engage in Misconduct: Adolescents' Expectations of Probable Consequences", *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1990), p. 52.

16. Other studies show that friendship primarily leads to opportunities for personal and social growth, and helps young people find a meaningful place in the world. See, for example, Czikszentmihalyi and Larson, *Being Adolescent*, pp. 157 and 175.
17. Sidel, *On Her Own*, p. 118.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 133.
21. Sandy Head, "A Study of Attitudes and Behaviour in Dating Relationships With Special Reference to the Use of Force", Board of Education for the City of Scarborough, 1988, unpublished.
22. Raymond C. Bingham, "AIDS and Adolescents: Threat of Infection and Approaches for Prevention", *Journal of Early Adolescence*, vol. 9, nos. 1-2 (1989), pp. 50-66. See also Mary Beth Sunenblick, "The AIDS Epidemic: Sexual Behaviors of Adolescents", *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, vol. 59, no. 1 (1988), pp. 21-37.
    On contraception and self-esteem, see Edward Harold et al., "Self-Esteem, Locus of Control, and Adolescent Contraception", *Journal of Psychology*, vol. 101 (1979), p. 87.
23. Vaughn I. Rickert et al., "Adolescents and AIDS: Females' Attitudes and Behaviors toward Condom Purchase and Use", *Journal of Adolescent Health Care*, vol. 10, no. 4 (1989), pp. 313-316.
24. Researchers have also suggested that institutions such as school which may deprive young women of their self-esteem play a less significant role in their lives. See P.M. O'Malley and J.G. Bachman, "Self-esteem: Change in Stability between Ages 13 and 23", *Developmental Psychology*, vol. 19 (1983), pp. 257-268.
25. The satisfaction rate for the young women was slightly higher: 78.7% said they were satisfied with school. This was still almost 15% under the number of those who said achieving in school was important to them.
26. Interpreting these results is difficult, since input from students who have dropped out of school is not included.
27. See Reginald Bibby and Donald Posterski, *The Emerging Generation: An Inside Look at Canada's Teenagers* (Toronto: Irwin, 1985), p. 152. See also Myrna Kostash, *No Kidding: Inside the World of Teenage Girls* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987).
28. Reported by Suzanne Daley, in "Self-image in Girls Lower than Boys after Adolescence", *The Globe and Mail*, January 10, 1991, p. A15. The same study suggests that schools do little to change the undervaluing of young women that prevails in society.
29. Czikszentmihalyi and Larson, *Being Adolescent*, p. 226.
30. Sidel, *On Her Own*, p. 80. For an analysis of educational models, see Elliott Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On Design and Evaluation of School Programs* (New York: MacMillan, 1985). See also Garret Keizer, *No Place But Here: A Teacher's Vocation in a Rural Community* (New York: Viking, 1988).
31. See Laurence Steinberg et al., "Noninstructional Influences on High School Student Achievement: The Contribution of Parents, Peers, Extra-curricular Activities, and Part-time Work", Madison: National Center on Effective Secondary Schools, unpublished, 1988.
32. See Oneida Martin, "Now That I Am Graduating: Some High School Students' Perceptions of Themselves and Schooling Experiences", unpublished paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Educational Research Association, 1985.
33. On changing the school system, see Edward C. Martin, "Reflections on the Early Adolescent in School", p. 196, and R.W. Connell et al., *Making the Difference: Schools, Families and Social Division* (Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1982), p. 120.
34. Richards and Larson, "The Life Space and Socialization of the Self", p. 620.


"Kids would be able to give their opinions in politics because it will affect us in the future."
"I'd help the head powers in our world realize that nuclear weapons are wrong."
"Quebec and Ontario aren't the only provinces in Canada. Think about it."
"Women are...treated with little respect as though we are meat and we are classified by size and shape too much."

Many young women feel they are all too often relegated by adults to an isolated group, defined merely by their age and gender. They warn that they do not exist in isolation from their society's institutions: young people are as much a part of the culture they inhabit as are adults.

The most obvious way in which young people participate in the "external world" of the public sphere is through work, as members of the paid labour force. But they also seek expression in the political world. A look at their responses to the open-ended questions shows they have a wide-ranging curiosity about all kinds of public figures, from politicians and lobbyists to entertainers and researchers, and about interactions in the public sphere.

In families, schools, workplaces, and among peers, they learn about the future power arrangements of society. If they gain certain kinds of understandings, they may begin to have the capacity to alter them. If Canadian society truly seeks to foster strength and independence in its adults, it must also encourage young people to realize that they are part of interdependent institutions and ideologies. When cultural arrangements make sense to them, young people feel both connected and autonomous, combining a historical consciousness and a sense of freedom.

As one 13-year-old so forcefully put it, young people feel adults must "give teenagers their place in society, trust and respect them more." They are touched by the public sphere; they think about many of the same social and political dilemmas; they are affected by the same political decisions; they inhabit our common world.

THE PAID WORK FORCE

The survey findings show that 56% of young women work for pay.[1] As might be expected, adolescents are more likely to work for pay – and tend to work more hours per week – as they grow older. Employed 16-year-old women report working about 10.7 hours a week, while (legally under-age) 13-year-old girls work 6.5 hours a week. Employed 16-year-old men work almost 12 hours a week; 13-year-old boys work just under five hours a week.

56% of young women work for pay.

Young women find work less satisfying as they grow older, but young men become slightly more satisfied.

However, young people rarely brought up the subject of work in the open-ended questions. Indeed, they seemed off-hand, even

dismissive, about their jobs: "Most of our jobs are at Wendy's or McDonald's", wrote one young woman.

Other studies have shown that most young people still in school work to earn money to spend on themselves. Some young people's reasons for working also depend on socio-economic factors: they work to contribute to their family's income, or to support a family business.[2]

It may be that young women were not forthcoming about work in their written replies simply because, although they may be unhappy with their "Wendy's or McDonald's" jobs, they do not feel they can complain, since they chose to work voluntarily.

And certainly, many of them **are** unhappy with their jobs: satisfaction with paid work was at the bottom of the list of nine items the young women were asked to rate. A third of the young women said their jobs were **unsatisfying**. Only 16% found their work **very satisfying**, and 40% said they were **satisfied**, for a total of about 56%. The figures may suggest that many young women feel their work is banal.

The number of young women who find their jobs **very satisfying** decreases almost 10%, from 23% of 13-year-olds to 14% of 16-year-old women. By contrast, 15% of the 13-year-old boys and 17% of the 16-year-old men are **very satisfied** with their paid work.

Again, because the survey was administered in schools, it did not include adolescents who have left school, and who are either working or seeking work. Their responses about the workplace would likely have been more elaborate.

Almost 70% of young women say they worry about money – and this includes 21% who strongly agree they are worried.

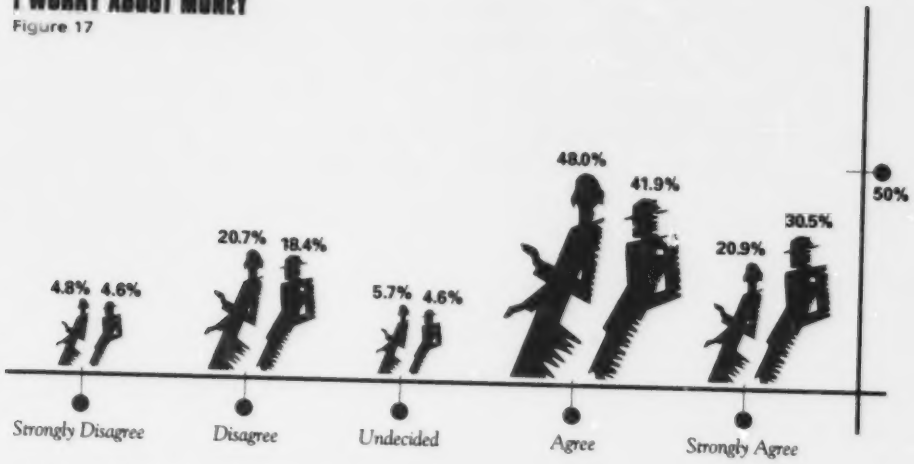
Over 76% of young women feel they have the same opportunities as young men in the workplace.

I Worry about Money

Financial issues concern women of all ages. Almost 70% of young women say they worry about money, including 21% who **strongly agree** they worry. The level of concern increases by 14% between ages 13 and 16. Regional differences on this issue are also pronounced: significantly more Quebec respondents worry about money than do young people from any of the other regions.[3]

Almost 35% of young women say their finances are unsatisfying. Only 14% say they are **very satisfying**, and 42% are **somewhat satisfied**, for a total of 56%. Even though many are far from satisfied with their financial situation and the jobs they have, young women do not link these to gender discrimination. Asked whether their employment opportunities are as good as those of the other sex, 76% agree they are, including 36% who **strongly agree**. Four per cent more

I WORRY ABOUT MONEY
Figure 17



of the young men agree with the statement. Satisfaction levels with their finances and their paid work ranked the two lowest of the nine items eliciting a "degree of satisfaction" response.

SATISFACTION WITH FINANCES AND PAID WORK
Figure 18

Perhaps it is only once they leave school to join the labour force full-time that young women are exposed to the many forms of gender discrimination – unequal pay, sexual harassment, barriers to opportunity, pink-collar ghettos, and the "double day" of juggling a job and unpaid work in the home. Here again, it would be invaluable to know how the outlook of young women who have

left school before graduating to work or to look for a job compares with the perspective of young women still in school.

At any rate, even while they are still students, young women worry a great deal about finances: this anxiety may in itself reflect a growing awareness of the difficulties women face in the work force.[4]

Work and School

Schools should offer workplace skills and the capacity for political analysis of labour force issues.

Research suggests that schools could help students grapple with the social and political issues that arise in the workplace.[5] Schools could be powerful forces in offering students the skills to analyze, from a political perspective, issues such as pay equity, sexual harassment in the workplace, workers' benefits, compensation, and unemployment insurance.

Schools could also help make work a less alienating experience than it is now. Young women find their jobs routine, and devoid of contact with full-time staff. These jobs – mostly in places such as fast-food restaurants and small retail businesses – are so unrewarding that young women value them only for the money they earn and for the contact with other workers their age.[6]

Working also alienates some young people from school. School administrators and trustees have said they are anxious about the effects on students of working for pay.[7] There is, it seems, ample cause for concern: researchers have found that working can diminish students' confidence in their academic ability, and that their marks, aspirations, and academic achievement in general can suffer.[8]

Because it seems likely that, for whatever reasons, students will continue to work for pay, schools should take measures that integrate work and school experiences. Other studies propose, for example, that schools offer more courses which include learning about workplaces and in which the teacher is also a specialist in the field covered by the course.[9]

Others say that if paid work is inevitable, it should at least complement – not compete with – the school experience, and not merely devour a student's time and energy. When work and school are unrelated to each other and to any probable future, work interferes with growth.[10] Other researchers suggest that the work experience should promote growth in autonomy, increase cooperation and social responsibility, and lead to learning useful skills; it should advance the students' occupational development, and bring young people into contact with adults.[11]

If school administrators are sincere in their concern about the futures of working students, and if they acknowledge the importance of schools' roles, they will take pains to provide support to those students. They will agitate for work arrangements that benefit the present and future of students who work out of dire necessity or out of perceived need.

Some day, teachers will contribute to young people's understanding of benefits, compensation, and unemployment insurance. They will discuss worker safety, employment equity, pay equity, abundance and scarcity; they will discuss poverty and the reasons why certain kinds of workers are paid better than others. They can guide students toward constructing a political ethic, rather than accepting assumptions about the economic milieu. Students need to be offered knowledge of workplace relationships and theories of value so that they may grow beyond the "limits of individuality."[12]

POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND POWER RELATIONS

The young women's survey responses showed that many were aware of the impact of politics on their lives. Over 37% of them disagreed with the statement, "Politicians have little influence on my present life." Over 13% said they were **undecided**, while a total of 49% agreed. Political awareness increased with age: the number of young women who thought politicians influenced their lives increased from 33% of the 13-year-olds to 39% of the 16-year-olds. At the same time, the **undecided** responses decreased from 18% to 14%.

Regional differences on the issue also emerged: more young women in British Columbia, the Prairies, and the Atlantic provinces thought that politicians influenced their lives than in other regions. Fewer young women in Quebec and Ontario said politicians affected them.

Fewer young women in Quebec and Ontario than in other regions say politicians affect them.

"Politics" tops the list of issues about which young women find it hard to obtain information.

Young women's awareness of the importance of political decisions increases from about 33% at age 13 to almost 40% at age 16.

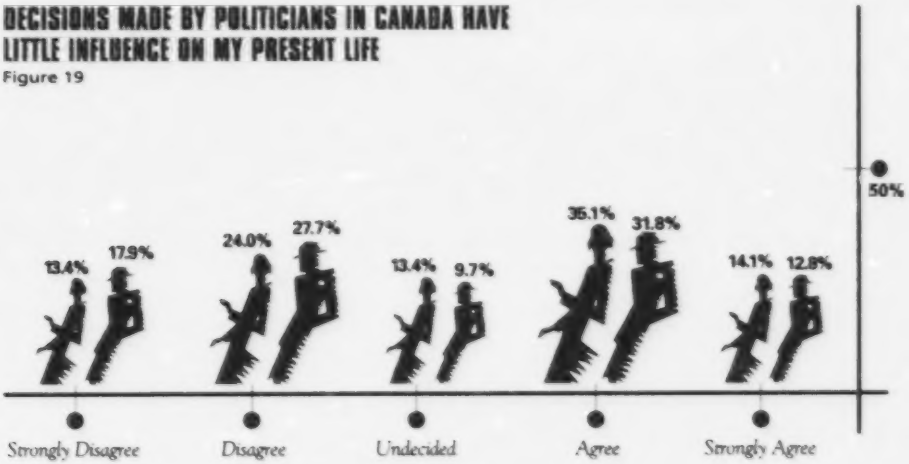
What Young Women Said about Politics

Political issues and political people came up often in the young women's responses to the open-ended questions. Asked what things concerned them most, they listed not only concerns about their personal lives, but a wide range of political issues: the environment, war and peace, employment, violence and crime, poverty, racism, sexism, discrimination, and a general concern about the shape of "the future".

Similarly, they were curious about politics, and wanted to understand it better. Asked to list topics about which they found it hard to get information, young women named "politics" most often. They wanted to understand the world of power relations.

DECISIONS MADE BY POLITICIANS IN CANADA HAVE LITTLE INFLUENCE ON MY PRESENT LIFE

Figure 19



If You Could Invite Any Three People to Speak or Visit at Your School, Whom Would You Select?

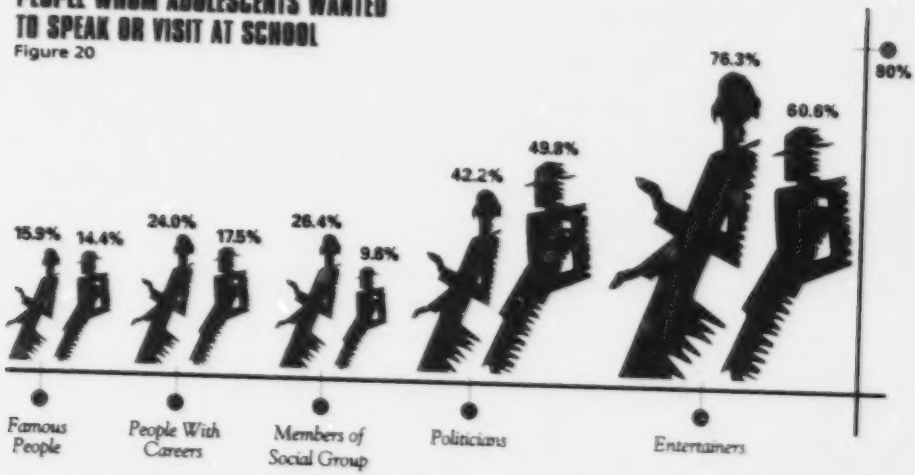
By far, entertainers topped the list of people whom the young women said they would like to hear speak. However, they also listed people involved in social or political issues, such as environmentalists, people from other countries, or drug users. They also requested speakers with career experience in medicine, science, and criminal justice.

It is important to keep in mind that the speakers named by the young women are not necessarily role models or even people they like, but rather people they find interesting, for one reason or another. For example, a 15-year-old said she would like to hear Chantal Daigle speak – but not, she explained in a note attached to her survey, because she approved of Daigle's abortion or the publicity surrounding the case.

Entertainers

About 76% of the young women listed entertainers as speakers they would like to hear. Tom Cruise, Paula Abdul, New Kids on the Block,

PEOPLE WHOM ADOLESCENTS WANTED TO SPEAK OR VISIT AT SCHOOL
Figure 20



Martine St. Clair, Eddie Murphy, Oprah Winfrey, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, André Gagnon, Billy Joel, Spike Lee, Rob Lowe, Richard Séguin, Bob Dylan – hundreds of names appeared in this category. This is no surprise, given their prominence in the media.

The vast majority of the entertainers were male. It appears that both sexes are far more likely to recognize male celebrities than female ones.[13] Other research has also shown that the sexes relate to male celebrities differently: while young men identify directly with them, young women imagine being in a romantic relationship with them.[14]

Politicians

Roughly 42% of the young women wanted to hear politicians speak, making them the second-largest category of requested speaker. Many were interested in hearing Brian Mulroney, George Bush, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Nelson Mandela, who had just been released from prison at the time of the survey. Others listed European leaders and "the lady president of India", as well as Canadian figures such as Jacques Parizeau, Ed Broadbent, various Members of Parliament, and some provincial leaders.

The requests reflected a wide range of interests, from local and national politics to international affairs and historical events. Yasser Arafat, Jimmy Carter, Manuel Noriega, Steven Biko, and even Sir John A. MacDonald, Napoleon, and Mussolini were among the people the young women named.

Young women's written commentaries shed some light on why they wanted to hear some of these speakers. Many worried about peace in the world: "I'd help the head powers in our world realize that nuclear weapons are wrong", wrote one. Another hoped, "However unrealistic, I would greatly like to see us achieve world peace."

Over 76% of young women listed entertainers – most of them men – as speakers they wanted to hear at their school. Over 40% of them wanted to hear political people.

Others were concerned about inequality as a political issue: one 15-year-old wrote that she wished "there would be equal opportunities for all people to become successful in life", adding, "Quebec and Ontario aren't the only provinces in Canada. Think about it."

In this category again, for obvious reasons, men by far outnumbered women in the list of speakers, although some included politicians' wives in their requests. One 13-year-old wrote that she wished there were "more women prime ministers and presidents"; another wished for "more women in politics".

Social/Political Groups

Twenty-six per cent of the young women said they wanted to hear somebody who had had a particular social experience or represented a social or political group. This was the third-largest category of speaker they requested, and the variety of people and issues it covers reflects the very broad range of issues about which young women are curious.

"I'd help the head powers in our world realize that nuclear weapons are wrong."

"However unrealistic, I would greatly like to see us achieve world peace."

They wanted to hear from people such as a concentration camp survivor, a person with AIDS, an immigrant, a Nobel Prize winner, a homeless person. Prisoners, rich people, school drop-outs, university students, Vietnam veterans – all these and more are intriguing to young women.

Those who requested speakers from social and political groups were interested in such people as United Nations staff, members of Amnesty International, women's rights groups, drug addiction prevention organizations, suicide prevention groups, and Greenpeace.

Career People

About a quarter of the young women wanted to meet people in different kinds of careers: accountants, astronauts, attorneys, authors, stockbrokers, police officers, scientists, social workers, speech therapists, physiotherapists, and singers. A few wanted to hear poets, hypnotists, and even a researcher at the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

Others

Various famous people who did not fall into any particular category made up the fifth-largest category of speakers the young women wanted to hear. Almost 16% requested such figures as Dr. Ruth, Henry Morgentaler, and Ben Johnson's doctor. Gloria Steinem and Marla Maples appeared on the list, as did Socrates and David Suzuki.

Thirteen per cent of the young women wanted to invite members of their family to speak at their school: mothers and uncles and "my cousin from New Brunswick". Finally, 7% listed religious leaders such as Billy Graham, Cardinal Léger, the president of the Mormon Church, and even Noah, Moses, and Jesus.

Gender Differences

While the young men requested the same kinds of speakers as did the young women, the rank order of the categories reflects a difference in interest level and priorities from those of the young women.

Entertainers topped the list for the young men, too, but fewer requested them overall – 61%, compared to about 76% of the young women.

Athletes made up the second-largest category, with 53% of the young men wanting to meet sports figures. This is not surprising; as a 1989 study shows, in students' minds, male popularity depends on being an outstanding athlete.[15]

Almost 50% of the young men wanted to hear politicians speak – 8% more than the young women. On the other hand, they were less interested in meeting people with careers – 18%, compared to 24% of the young women. Interest in hearing famous people and family members was roughly the same for the young men as it was for the young women – 14% and 16%, respectively.

The most revealing difference between the young women and the young men emerges in the category of people who represent a social experience. The third-largest category of speaker for the young women, it occupies seventh place on the young men's list, totalling just 10% of the requests, compared to 26% of the young women's requests.

Over a quarter of young women wanted to hear speakers from social or political groups, compared to 10% of young men.

The second-largest category of speaker for young women was politicians; for young men, athletes ranked second.

Women in the Public Eye

Women are virtually invisible in the list of public figures young people consider important or interesting, and whom they would like to speak or visit at their schools. Only 4% of the athletes named are women; only eight of the 44 authors are women. Women make up just 14 of the 60 "famous" people, 31 of the 200 singers, and only seven of the 100 politicians, three of them politicians' wives.[16]

It may be that, because women are virtually absent from the public realm, young women did not think of them when they listed speakers they wanted to hear – or there simply weren't many women who came to mind. It could also be that many young people do not think that women are as important in the public sphere as are men; young women's internalized stereotypical beliefs about women should not be underestimated.

Only seven of the 100 political figures whom young women would invite to their schools were women; three of them were, in fact, politicians' wives.

However, many young women commented in the open-ended questions that they wanted women to have a more powerful place in society. They wrote, for instance, that they would like to see "more women in politics" and hoped that "women could be equal in everyone's minds". Others wished they could change "discrimination against women in the workplace", and "the way men feel about women and their attitude that 'women should be barefoot and pregnant' ".

One young woman felt this sort of attitude was already prevalent in the classroom:

> *"Males in my class are major put-downs to the females. Women are also treated with little respect as though we are meat and we are classified by size and shape too much."*

She was not altogether wrong. A 14-year-old boy hoped that "Brian wouldn't be so petty about protecting the rights of women and minorities in his celebrated Accord." Some young men complained, "Women's lib has to go", wanted to "blockade women's lib", and thought "women should lose rights".

However, other young men believed in strengthening women's rights. They wrote that they hoped to change "racial and sexual discrimination", and to "make all men and women of any colour have equal rights." Some young men might be prepared to join women in changing political consciousness.

Young Women and Political Involvement

Young women care about political and social issues; many have strong convictions about the principles and practices they feel should guide political decisions.[17] Many think about the impact of politics not only on them, but on others as well. One 16-year-old wrote that she hoped her generation would "create a better government than we have today. They are unjustified, selfish and greedy."

Others took this idea a step further, saying they were ready to participate fully in politics right here and now, that it is unjust to exclude them from the processes that influence their lives. Asked what she would change about her life or the world, one 13-year-old wrote, "Kids would be able to give their opinions in politics because it will affect us in the future." Another said that people should be able "to vote at age 16".

Political understandings and analyses are not being offered to young people. Although their culture provides them with a bewildering array of possibilities, it offers them inadequate guidance toward sorting through and making sense of complexity. Many young women felt mystified or confused about politics. As mentioned earlier, they said information on "politics" was the most difficult kind of material for them to obtain. Some remarked that they didn't know "who to believe in", and felt despair that "we don't know who to listen to".

"... we don't know who to listen to."

Indeed, the image of the self-absorbed, apolitical adolescent seems to be one of the adult myths about young people that has little foundation in reality. A glance at the scanty research on young people and politics shows what little attention adults pay to the views of the next generation. Even in fields such as education, sociology, and psychology, very few studies have been done on young people and politics, on their political imagination and beliefs.[18]

Similarly, the obligatory social studies curricula in schools that give a perfunctory overview of "democracy, communism, and fascism" are unlikely to match the range and depth of interest that young people show in social and political issues.

Thus, aside from youth groups in political parties, a few church groups and volunteer organizations, there seem to be few routes through which young people can find the understanding of – and involvement with – politics they seek.

Politically, then, they are alienated, just as they are in the workplace and at school, as the survey findings on their "immediate world" indicate. They want to get involved, to feel involved, to understand and **be** understood – but in what setting? Lamentably, the possibilities are limited.[19]

In political and social issues, adults – and particularly adult women – could offer the same kind of support as friends do, as well as the depth of understanding that comes with experience. Young women, in turn, have their energy and aspirations to offer battle-weary adults in their common quest for an egalitarian society.[20]

This is not to say women of all ages necessarily share the same concerns. For example, although affordable housing is an important concern for adult women, young women say they are content with their housing conditions. In fact, 87% of young women say they are satisfied with their housing, including 48% who are **very satisfied**, making housing second only to friendships in its satisfaction rating.

On the other hand, issues such as violence against women and discrimination in the workplace are concerns that affect women of all ages, and on which they could act together.

It is clear from their comments that young women want someone with whom to talk, to exchange views, and to act, as they make their way through the private and public spheres, through the personal and political complexities they encounter. They write about wanting to meet "an ordealed person who has gone through many troubles", an "old storyteller", or simply, someone "nice, kind, and understanding".

They "need someone to talk to and confide in" as they try to make sense of, and find a way of being heard in, an adult world that many of them find indifferent if not hostile to their presence.

SUMMARY

Over half the young women reported that they work for pay, with the number of hours per week rising from six to eleven between the ages of 13 and 16. Although slightly more than half the young women say they are satisfied with their jobs, almost 70% worry about money, and over a third say they are not satisfied with their finances. Both these concerns increase with age.

Young women do not believe that gender discrimination affects them in the workplace. However, the number of young women who are **very satisfied** with their jobs decreases by 9% from age 13 to 16, whereas for young men it increases slightly.

Responses to the open-ended questions show that young women care about political and social problems, and that they think about ways of resolving them. It is also clear that many of them feel frustrated that they are often ignored or shut out of the political arena by adults, and that information about political issues is hard to find.

Over a third of young people agree that politics affects them. Political figures rank second in the list of speakers whom young women would invite to talk at their school. For young men, politicians rank third on the list, after athletes. Entertainers are by far the largest category of speakers requested by both sexes.

A striking difference between young women and young men emerges in their stated preference for speakers: young women are much more curious about people who could talk to them about a social experience, such as drug users, political activists, and environmentalists. This is the third-largest category for young women, but ranks only seventh for young men.

Very few women appear in the lists of speakers, reflecting the scarcity of prominent women in the public sphere. Many young women commented they would like to see more women in politics.

GLANCE-BOX

YOUNG WOMEN AND PAID WORK

- percentage of young women with jobs: 56%
- satisfaction: 33% unsatisfied, 56% satisfied
- finances: 35% unsatisfied, 56% satisfied
- equal opportunity to succeed: 76% agreed

POLITICAL DECISIONS

- affects young women: 37% agreed

SPEAKERS REQUESTED

Young Women
- entertainers: 76%
- politicians: 42%
- members of social group*: 26%
- people with careers: 24%
- "famous" people: 16%

Young Men
- entertainers: 61%
- athletes: 53%
- politicians: 50%
- people with careers: 18%
- "famous" people: 14%

* members of social groups were requested by only 10% of young men

ENDNOTES: Chapter Three

1. A study by the Canadian Teachers' Federation on working students produced similar figures. See *A Cappella: A Report on the Realities, Concerns, Expectations and Barriers Experienced by Adolescent Women in Canada* (Ottawa: 1990). See also the Canadian Youth Foundation, *Canada's Youth: Ready for Today: A Comprehensive Survey of 15-24 Year Olds* (Ottawa: 1988), p. 28. A 1989 study by the Calgary Board of Education found 52% of its students worked for pay. See Anthony Johnson, "Kids at Work Worry Schools", *Calgary Herald*, December 13, 1990, p. B2.
2. On work as a means of earning spending money for young people, see Ellen Greenberger and Laurence Steinberg, *When Teenagers Work: The Psychological and Social Costs of Adolescent Employment* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), p. 30. Other studies have shown that parents also encourage young people to work in order to "keep them out of trouble", to learn responsibility, the value of money, etc. See Francis A.J. Ianni, *The Search for Structure: A Report on American Youth Today* (New York: Free Press, 1989), p. 159.
3. We cannot, of course, speculate on the source of their anxiety, whether it derives from their wages or socio-economic status.
4. On women in the labour force, see Morley Gunderson and Leon Muszynski, *Women and Labour Market Poverty* (Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1990).
5. On the importance of learning the history of workplace relationships and theories of value, see Mihaly Czikszentmihalyi and Reed Larson, *Being Adolescent: Conflict and Growth in the Teenage Years* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).
6. Ianni, *The Search for Structure*, p. 167.
7. Johnson, "Kids at Work Worry Schools".
8. Jeylan Mortimer and Michael Finch, "To Work or Not To Work: Adolescent Employment and the Process of Achievement", *Wisconsin Sociologist*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1985), pp. 32-38. Research indicates that working may also alienate young people from their families, causing them to spend less time with their families (the time they spend with friends is not affected, however). See Greenberger and Steinberg, *When Teenagers Work*, pp. 189-202.
9. See David Stern et al., "Work Experience for Students in High School and College", *Youth and Society*, vol. 21, no. 3 (1990), p. 356.
10. See Ianni, *The Search for Structure*, p. 158.
11. Greenberger and Steinberg, *When Teenagers Work*, p. 209. See also Maureen Baker, *"What Will Tomorrow Bring?..." A Study of the Aspirations of Adolescent Women* (Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1985), p. 71.
    However, one study concluded that working while being a student does not necessarily increase her/his chances of success in the work force after graduation. See Stern et al., "Work Experience for Students in High School and College", p. 367.
12. See Czikszentmihalyi and Larson, *Being Adolescent*, p. 281.
13. Television contributes to the high visibility of male characters. NBC recently announced that it was cutting all Saturday morning cartoons with female characters as central figures because although girls watch them, boys do not. The American Association of University Women found that the preferential treatment of boys on television can lower self-esteem in girls, who begin to apologize for their opinions by early adolescence. See Bill Carter, "Children's TV, Where Boys Are King", *New York Times*, May 1, 1991, p. A1.

14. Carolyn Adams-Price and A.L. Greene, "Secondary Attachments and Adolescent Self-Concept", *Sex Roles*, vol. 22, nos. 3/4 (1990), p. 192. See also Deborah Stiles et al., "The Smiling Sunbather and the Chivalrous Football Player: Young Adolescents' Images of the Ideal Woman and Man", *Journal of Early Adolescence*, vol. 7, no. 4 (1987).
15. A U.S. study found that most young men believe they must be an "outstanding athlete" to be popular in school; for young women, popularity depends on belonging to the "right group". See Alan Goldberg and Timothy Chandler, "The Role of Athletics: The Social World of High School Adolescents", *Youth and Society*, vol. 21, no. 2 (1989), p. 245.
16. Interestingly, of the 31 women singers, a third were Québécoise, and the rest from the United States.
17. Previous studies have shown that young people have a highly developed sense of right and wrong, which they can apply to political and social dilemmas. For example, Carol Gilligan found that young men have a strong, even adamant, sense of right and wrong, and young women show a strong desire for fairness and to understand the context for moral decisions. Both these tendencies are present in both sexes at an early age. See Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
18. One notable exception is a U.S. study of the political priorities of young people, which identified three main themes: law and order (the desire for a crime-free, peaceful community); abundance (the desire to end poverty); and equality (the desire to end economic and racial discrimination). See Joseph Adelson, "The Political Imagination of the Young Adolescent", in *Twelve to Sixteen: Early Adolescence*, Jerome Kagan and Robert Coles, eds. (New York: Norton, 1972).
19. Some researchers have suggested that participating in a challenging activity is crucial to the personal development of young people. In activities such as sports, dance, or learning music, young people learn about themselves at the same time as they learn the necessary skills. Friendships give young people a chance to develop their social skills – but the skills and insights they could learn from school, work, and political involvement are often neglected because the inroads to these areas are either rare or uninviting. See Czikszentmihalyi and Larson, *Being Adolescent*, pp. 249-256, 260.
20. In order to work towards a future in which women are independent, and yet have the social and domestic support they need, women of all ages must join forces, building a creative vision of alternative social and personal arrangements together. See Ruth Sidel, *On Her Own: Growing Up in the Shadow of the American Dream* (New York: Viking Press, 1990).

"Make it so money isn't everything...
so people living in poverty will have a chance to make it."
"Do you like yourself?"
"Is school worthwhile?"
"Do you think we could re-make a foolproof ozone layer?"
"Are you afraid of war?"

So far, we have looked at the way young women feel about themselves, the "immediate world" they move in, and the "external world" around them – but not at the way these three worlds intersect in their lives.

Obviously, the concerns, fears, and hopes they describe do not exist in three separate worlds in real life. On the contrary: they are woven into each other, merging and separating according to the way young women sort through them, the links they draw between one "world" and another.[1]

Is one of these "worlds" more important to them than the others? Do they worry more about their personal lives than about political issues, or vice versa? What concerns are pressing; which are less immediate – the environment, school, family ties, poverty, war, peer pressure? Do they see issues such as violence, abuse, and drug use as social dilemmas, as personal questions, or as both?

Not surprisingly, the survey findings on these complexities are far from clear-cut. However, comparing a series of open-ended questions touching on these issues yields some important insights into the way young women see the world – including some of the contradictions and inconsistencies of that vision.

CONCERNS AND DESIRED CHANGES

What Do You Think Are Five of the Most Important Concerns, Problems, or Fears for You and People Your Age?

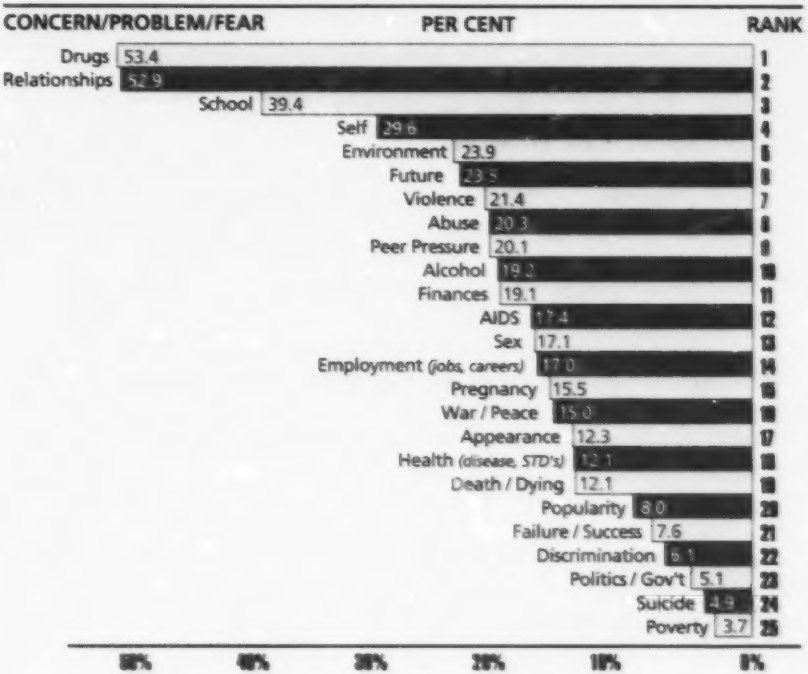
Young people were asked to list the five issues that concerned them most. The problems they named were then grouped into categories and themes, and ranked by the number of times they were mentioned. The commentaries they wrote in response to this and the other open-ended questions provided the data for this chapter. The result is a profile of the issues the young people themselves – as opposed to adult "observers" – see as the main problems confronting them.

Drugs and relationships are by far the most common concerns, each mentioned by about 53% of young women. School is the third-largest category, at almost 40%, while personal issues ("the self") were named by 30%. Environmental concerns rank fifth at 24%, followed by "the future", also at roughly 24%.

Over half of the young women listed drugs and relationships as concerns; these two issues topped the list of concerns for both sexes.

About a quarter of the young women were concerned about the environment.

TABLE 1: YOUNG WOMEN'S FIVE "CONCERNS/PROBLEMS/FEARS": RANK ORDER AND PERCENTAGE



Drugs top the list of concerns for young men as well. However, they are more worried about school, which ranks second on their list. Relationships and the environment follow these first two concerns. Interestingly, alcohol is a far greater worry to young men than it is to young women: the fifth-largest category for the young men, it ranks tenth on the young women's list.

About the Categories

The categories of concerns were taken from the young women's own choice of words and from the associations they made in their comments. For example, the "relationship" category groups together all references to family, friends, boyfriends, parent(s), relatives, and "people". While these could have been listed separately, the young women's comments seem to show that they were thinking of the way they relate in daily life to people around them, rather than thinking of a specific relationship. For example, they often listed several relationships under one "concern", then passed on to the next four.[2]

Similarly, the category of "the future" reflects the young women's phrasing. While some listed detailed concerns about the future – global warming, or nuclear war, for example – about 24% simply wrote "the future". Although it seems vague, so many young women wrote it down that it clearly represented a concern in its own right for them. By the same token, most of the young women who mentioned "abuse" listed the word by itself, without specifying whether they meant physical, sexual, emotional, or child abuse.

The young women's responses draw attention to the advantages (or disadvantages) of truly open-ended questions. Although the use of closed-ended questions would have enabled a less ambiguous reporting of the data, such a strategy would have forced young people to "fit in" to the researcher's schema and associated meanings.

The strategy of using open-ended questions ensured that the intention seriously to listen to the voices of young women was fulfilled. In response to the open-ended question about concerns, the young women themselves created and defined the range of concerns and the associated meanings: the 25 themes on the list account for 97% of the responses (the remaining 3% were issues raised too rarely to collapse as categories).

Thus, for example, most of those who wrote that AIDS was a concern listed it by itself; only a few young people combined it with sexually transmitted diseases or other health concerns. Because it appeared most often as a single topic, it was counted as a separate category.

It may also be important to remember that the percentages reported in each category are often lower than those reported in studies employing only closed-ended strategies.[3] As a point of reference, then, it may be helpful to keep in mind that if no topic had been chosen any more often than the others, each concern would have been listed by only 4% of young women. By contrast, 24% listed the environment as a concern; 53% named drugs. Thus, rank order is as significant as percentages.

Concerns: Are They Personal or Political?

While personal issues such as "school" and "the self" emerge as the main concerns for young women, many of the other issues they volunteer show a split between personal and political or social issues. Although some of the categories are clearly personal

Some young women listed personal concerns such as "appearance", but many others named political or social dilemmas, such as "war/peace".

Themes such as "finances" or "relationships" are often both personal and political.

preoccupations such as "appearance" and "popularity", many others present political or social dilemmas, such as "war/peace", "the future", "the environment".

In fact, some categories could not be classified as one or the other: some of the young women's written commentaries make it clear that, for them, the categories are both personal and political. For example, the young women's replies – in response to being asked what changes they would make – often clarify what problems they had in mind when listing their concerns.

One 13-year-old wrote she hoped for changes in environmental policy "because it would be nice for my family name to go on for years into the future." A 17-year-old hoped to "try and save our planet from destruction" to prevent the "destruction of ourselves, and ... because people should become a family and come together in times of crisis." In the responses, public themes blended with the language of domestic relations.

"It would be nice for my family name to go on for years into the future."

" ... people should become a family and come together in times of crisis."

Concerns about "relationships" are not necessarily restricted to the personal sphere. One young woman wrote that she wished for "the safety of our families, friends and our homes"; another hoped for changes in relationships that would mean "never having fights going on with friends or families".

Even those who enumerated the same kind of issue, such as money, sometimes had different problems on their minds. Of those who listed finances as a concern, many simply wished to change the amount of money they had – but others had in mind social attitudes to money. "Make it so money isn't everything", wrote one. "And then prices will lower, rent, mortgages will lower, food will lower, so people living in poverty will have a chance to make it."

If You Could Change Anything in Your Personal Life and/or the World, Describe Three Changes You Would Make

A look at the changes young women wished they could make shows the depth of their interest in social and political issues, despite their apparent preoccupation with personal issues in the question about their concerns.

On the whole, their responses to the two questions overlap: 18 of the 25 concerns they named also appear on the list of changes they would make. However, the priority young women assign them is

strikingly different, with changes to political and social concerns rising towards the top of the list and personal issues falling, with reference to their rank in the list of concerns.

"Drugs", which topped the list of concerns, falls to eleventh place in the list of changes; "war/peace" takes second place, rising from sixteenth in the "concerns" list. Poverty rises from the 25th and last "concern" to fourth place in the list of changes, with over a quarter of young women naming it, compared to barely 4% of those who thought it was a concern.

Discrimination rises to fifth place with 23% of the young women listing it, while it ranked 22nd as a concern, mentioned by only 6% of the young women. Similarly, politics/government rises to eighth place with 15% of the young women wishing to change it, whereas only 5% said it was a concern, making it 23rd in the "concerns" list.

Relationships top the list of changes young women would like to make, but it ranks fourth for young men.

School was named as a change roughly twice as often by young men as by young women.

TABLE 2: YOUNG WOMEN'S THREE DESIRED "CHANGES": RANK ORDER AND PERCENTAGE

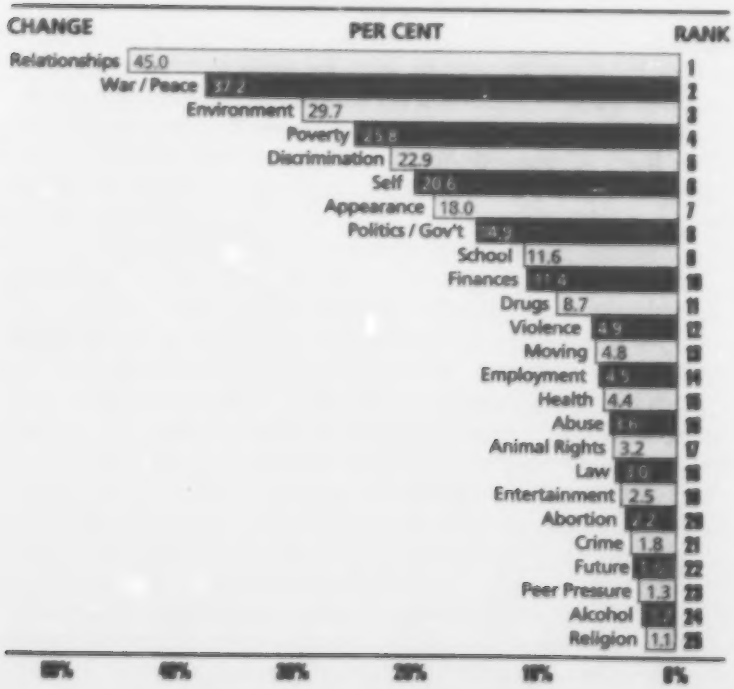
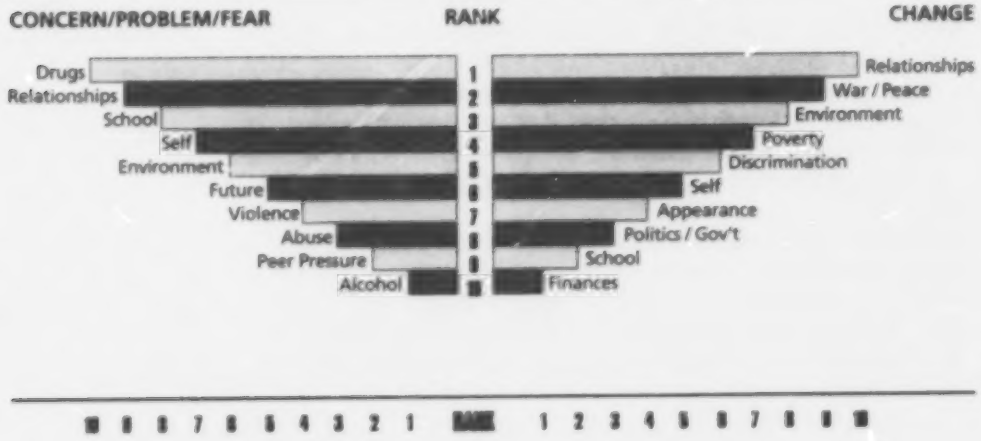


TABLE 3: COMPARISON OF YOUNG WOMEN'S "CONCERNS/PROBLEMS/FEARS" WITH YOUNG WOMEN'S DESIRED "CHANGES"



In fact, "relationships" is the only personal issue, other than appearance, that rises significantly in the list of changes, where it ranks first. Clearly, building close ties with others is still a top priority for young women, even relative to the pressing social issues they also listed. Still, it is interesting to note that the number of young women who actually name it as something they would like to change falls to 45% from 53% of those who were concerned about relationships. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the category does not necessarily group only personal concerns, but social and political ones as well.

Sharp gender differences also emerge in the question about changes. Relationships rank first for young women, but only fourth for young men, after war/peace, the environment, and money. Also striking is that for young women, poverty ranks fourth in the list of changes; for young men, money takes the third place. School is the fifth most commonly listed area that young men would like to change; it occupies ninth place for young women.

Concerns and Changes: Wrap-up

A look at the issues that concern young women and the changes they wish they could make shows how closely their personal lives, the "immediate world" they move in, and the "external world" around them are interwoven. All three blend in a web of mixed hopes, fears, and feelings about everything from "the self" to nuclear arms; no single sphere seems to take priority over the others.

As a comparison of the two questions about "concerns" and "changes" shows, young women give a great deal of thought to both the personal and the political, and seem to care equally about both. This finding offers quantitative evidence for the theories of feminist psychologists that young women are acutely aware of – and deeply affected by – the contexts in which they find themselves.

The personal and the political emerge as equally important to young women.

Young women call for help and understanding but also want to make a difference to others and the world around them.

In a 1990 U.S. study, researchers gave the example of a young woman who said that she would consider herself successful if she could be independent and make others happy as well. For her, self-fulfilment depends just as much on her role in society as it does on her personal development.[4] She values both connections and autonomy.

Similarly, a 13-year-old respondent wrote that she hoped "that around me we would have more groups to help people." Whether she hopes this for her own sake or for the sake of others is ambiguous – and fittingly so, because the young women in the survey repeatedly call out for help and understanding from others, but at the same time yearn to make a difference to others and the world around them.

Personal and political themes come together for young women. Is the mixture a harmonious one, a seamless web in which the two spheres complement each other to form a coherent whole? Or is it a confusing jumble of two incompatible but equally important sets of concerns? In contemporary culture, it may be the latter; if these young women can, in time, create new power arrangements, they may be able to integrate them.

The written commentaries cited earlier show that some young women see the personal and the political as two sides of the same coin. Others are unsure of how to reconcile them. Puzzled or uncertain about individual issues, many young women are less likely to see connections between a personal experience such as sexual abuse and its social meanings, or a social/political issue such as discrimination and its effects on them as individuals.

"EASY-TO-OBTAIN" VS. "HARD-TO-OBTAIN" INFORMATION

The young women were asked to list three issues about which they could easily find information, and three issues about which they find information hard to obtain. A comparison of the two lists offers insights into the issues that concern them, not only through the patterns that emerge in the two lists, but also through the contradictions and variety they unveil.

Over 25% of young women say information on politics is hard to get, making it the most inaccessible topic.

Information on many subjects reaches some young people but bypasses many others.

Most striking is the fact that "politics/government" emerges as the topic about which the young women find it most difficult to get information. Over 25% listed it as difficult; under 7% thought it was easy to get. Similarly, many young women agreed that information about "war and peace" is difficult to get, with 9% saying it is hard to obtain, and only 3% listing it as easy to obtain.

Their desire for such information is another sign that young women care about political and social issues, and want help in understanding them. It also indicates that the sources of information now in place for young women – school and the media, for example – are failing, and that lack of knowledge is not due to apathy or indifference on the part of young people.[5]

The young women were almost equally divided on nearly all the other issues on the two lists. For example, 21% said information about sex is hard to get; an equal percentage thought it easy. About 17% said information on health is hard to get; just as many listed it as easy. Seven of the top ten kinds of "easy-to-obtain" information are also listed among the top ten kinds of "hard-to-obtain" information.

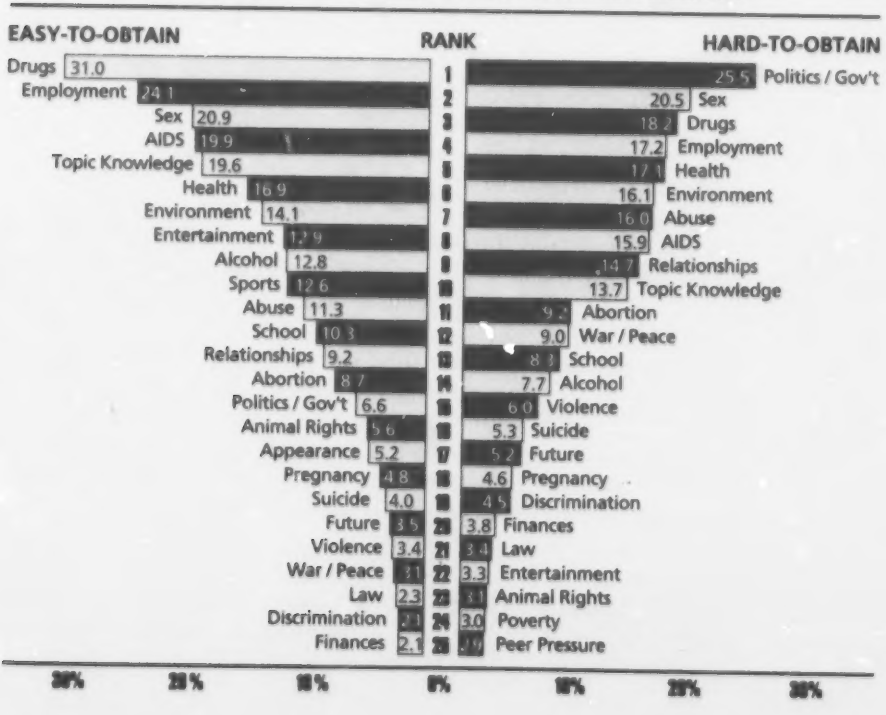
Of course, the young women were not so evenly split on all issues; still, that was the pattern that prevailed except for "politics" and "war and peace". Thirteen per cent more young women said information about drugs is easy to get than said it is hard to get; however, drugs still ranked third on the "hard-to-obtain" list.

Five per cent more of the young women thought information about abuse is hard to get than those who said it is easy; abuse ranked seventh on the list of "hard-to-obtain" information and eleventh on the "easy-to-obtain" list. Similarly, 6% more of the young women said information about relationships is hard to get, ranking it ninth on the "hard-to-obtain" list, and thirteenth on the "easy-to-obtain" list. They seemed to agree that information about sports and entertainment is easy to obtain.

On the whole, though, young women are remarkably divided on the extent of information available to them. This of course illustrates what was made clear by the diversity of their commentaries: they are not "examples" of a cohesive and easily defined group by virtue of their gender and date of birth. They come from different regions, races, domestic arrangements, and work lives. Although they may think about the same issues, and may be affected by the same problems, their understanding of these is filtered through each individual's experience.

One important example is the case of young people new to Canada. Schools must be sensitive to adolescent immigrants, who have a whole set of problems radically different from those of

TABLE 4: YOUNG WOMEN'S RESPONSES RE. "EASY-TO-OBTAIN" AND "HARD-TO-OBTAIN" INFORMATION: RANK ORDER AND PERCENTAGE



other young people. How will they receive and make sense of new information? For example, they must negotiate new systems of education and health care, new workplace arrangements, and often a new language.[6] School administrators, employers, agencies, and social service personnel all need to think carefully and, guided by research, to respond to the ever-growing variety in the population and to the need for creatively meeting young immigrants' needs for knowledge.

People and organizations trying to make information available to young people must, then, cast a wider net, varying their approach to fit the different situations and experiences of young people across the country. As responses to the next question show, the young women in the CACSW survey were themselves quite sensitive to the effects of individual experience on the way information is exchanged and what kinds of information can be exchanged with whom.

QUESTIONS FOR PEERS

What Three Questions Would You Ask Your Peers?

"Why do people discriminate?"

"How can you avoid teen sex without losing your boyfriend?"

"Is school where you can learn, or is first-hand experience better?"

In one of the open-ended questions, the young women were asked to list three questions they would like to ask their peers. The list of 25 topics they generated contains most of the same issues that appeared on the "concerns", "changes", and "information" lists – but the order is strikingly different.

Although the young women said "politics/government" was the hardest topic for them to get information about, it ranked eighth in the list of questions they would ask each other; 15% listed it as a question they would ask their peers, compared to the 26% who could not find information about it easily.

On the other hand, almost a third wanted to ask their peers about relationships, making it the most common subject of discussion they chose. Although they think political issues are important, and would like to know more about them, many do not look to their peers for that kind of understanding. They are more likely to turn to their peers for their opinions on personal issues such as relationships, "life", and "the self".

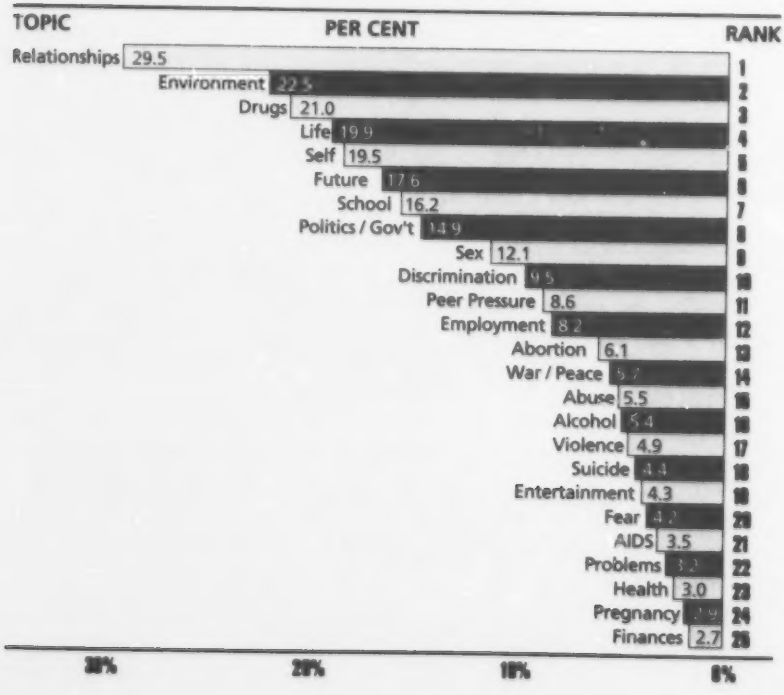
Similarly, roughly 12% wanted to ask their peers about sex, ranking it ninth on the list of questions, even though it ranked far lower on the list of "concerns" and did not even appear on the list of

"changes".[7] Young people do want to ask each other this question, even though it ranks only thirteenth as a "concern or fear".

"Are you ready for sex?", asked one young woman. "Do you have a fear of sex?", another wanted to know. Some wondered how to cope with pressure to have sex: "How can you avoid teen sex without losing your boyfriend?". Another wrote, "If you are constantly pressured to have sex at a young age, how is it possible to avoid it without getting abused?"

The way a question is worded – and who asks it – affects the response it draws out. Asked by the CACSW to describe their concerns or problems, the young women identified different issues from the ones they wanted to explore with their peers. As with the open-ended questions, which are invaluable in interpreting the closed-ended responses, shifting the role of the "questioner" from the CACSW to the young women themselves offers an enlarged portrait of their interests and concerns.

TABLE 5: QUESTIONS THAT YOUNG WOMEN WOULD LIKE TO ASK PEERS: RANK ORDER AND PERCENTAGE



Similarly, the fact that the young women listed whatever questions came to mind, rather than filling out a "check-list" of predetermined issues, means they could give full rein to their curiosity. The "life" category is one of the results: generated by their answers, this category ranked fourth on the list of questions, though it would probably not have appeared at all in a researcher's list.

"Will your life be better than your parents'?"

"How do you deal with rejection?"

"What is it like being you?"

This category included everything from broad questions such as "Do you enjoy your life?", to specific, highly personal ones, such as "What is the hardest question in your life for you to deal with?" and "What disgusts you most in life?" Others were forward-looking questions about life in the future: "Will your life be better than your parents'?" or "What do you intend to get out of it?"

Similarly, the questions about "the self" that the young women wanted to ask each other range from questions about self-esteem such as, "Do you like yourself?", "Are you self-confident?", "How do you deal with rejection?" to far broader questions: "What is it like being you?" and "Are you a good person?"

The young women who wanted to ask their peers about school wrote down questions that are themselves as revealing as the answers might have been. Some were worried about doing well in school: "Are grades important?", "How do you get good grades and not be considered a nerd?" Many seemed doubtful about the usefulness of school: "Is school where you can learn, or is first-hand experience better?", "Is school worthwhile?"

Again, young women were just as drawn to social and political questions as they were to personal problems. Over one in five wanted to know the views of their peers on environmental issues, making the environment second only to relationships in the list of questions they would pose. "What do you do to protect the environment?" wrote one young woman; another asked, "Do you think we could re-make a foolproof ozone layer?"

Roughly 15% wanted to question their peers about political issues. Some of these had to do with specific, topical issues: "How do you feel about religion and culture shown in the RCMP uniform?" asked one young woman; "Can French and English live together?" asked another. The young women also wanted to know what their peers thought of the Prime Minister, the GST, the federal budget, unemployment, and the Meech Lake Accord.

Still others were interested in more abstract political questions, such as, "Is Communism right?" or, "Why do people discriminate?" Finally, many young women showed an interest in Canada, asking their peers how they felt about their nation as a whole: "Do you believe in your country?" and "How do you rate our country compared to others?" Others wondered about war, asking, "Would you defend your country?" and "Are you afraid of war?"

Gender Differences

Here, as in the other questions, some sharp gender differences emerge. Although young women place relationships at the top of the list of questions they would ask, young men list it fourth, after drugs, school, and sex. Young women are far less interested in asking their peers' views on sex, ranking it ninth; similarly, school ranks seventh on their list of questions, whereas it is the second most commonly mentioned question for young men.

THE PERSONAL, THE POLITICAL, AND SELF-ESTEEM: COMMENTARY

As the last section of the survey illustrates, young people give a lot of thought not only to the issues that touch them most directly, but also to social and political problems.

Actively working on a social problem raises young people's self-esteem.

Indeed, there is a remarkably even balance between themes from the public and the private spheres in the list of issues they said concerned them, wanted to change, found hard or easy to get information about, and wanted to ask their peers about. Some translate the political into the personal in their comments and questions ("Would you defend your country?"), so that dividing the categories of issues they name into "public" and "private" spheres becomes problematic. Young women themselves seem not to make this distinction.

The high profile of "drugs" shows the importance a question takes on when private and public matters intersect.

The high profile of the topic of drug use in this part of the survey is another example of the importance an issue takes on when private and public issues intersect.[8] "Drugs is a concern for me, a problem for others", wrote one young woman. Both the prevalence of drugs and government anti-drug campaigns combine to make the issue a compelling one for young women. It is one of the few topics they ranked consistently in all the questions, listing it as a main concern, a change they would make, and an issue they would ask their peers about.

Previous studies suggest that connecting the personal and the political through action can bolster young people's sense of self-esteem and vice versa. For example, a 1989 U.S. study found that even in peacetime, young people worry a great deal about war, especially nuclear war. However, those who were very concerned about nuclear war, but who were also personally involved in politics, did not suffer from depression, anxiety, or low self-esteem as much as those who were not involved in politics.[9]

Psychologist Barbara Tizard concluded that being actively engaged in trying to solve a social problem – rather than simply worrying about it – increases young people's self-esteem and sense of their power to change things. Their self-esteem is also bolstered by the support they get from others working with them on the issue.[10]

Similarly, as reported in Chapter Two, a 1988 U.S. study of AIDS education projects shows that these are most effective when combined with programs to help individuals build self-esteem.[11] Thus, a strong sense of self-esteem, and a culture that allows them a public presence, combine to help young women move toward the fulfilment so many of them wrote about: a deeper understanding of and connections to the world they move in, and a more powerful role in shaping that world and their own lives.

SUMMARY

Young women are interested in both personal and political issues, giving them roughly equal profile in their responses. The five topics that concern them most are drugs and relationships, followed by school, the self, and the environment. Young men are less concerned about relationships, ranking it third after drugs and school; they also named the environment as a theme, placing it fourth on their list of concerns.

Asked what changes they would make in their lives or the world, young women focus more on social and political questions than they do in their list of concerns. Relationships top the list of changes, followed by war/peace, the environment, poverty, and discrimination. Young men also focus on war/peace, which is first on their list of changes; the environment ranks second, followed by money, relationships, and school.

Young women agree they find information about politics/ government hard to obtain; similarly, they say it is hard to find out much about issues to do with war and peace. On other matters, they are almost evenly divided, showing that most information reaches some groups and bypasses others. Of course, young people are not a homogeneous group because of their age. There are deep divisions by region, race, family settings, and other factors that matter as much as or more than age, and young people in different situations receive knowledge and information differently.

Asked what questions they would like to ask their peers, young women list relationships, the environment, and drugs. They also want to know how others would describe their lives in general, and are curious about their personal lives.

GLANCE-BOX

YOUNG WOMEN'S TOP FIVE CONCERNS:

1) Drugs: 53%
2) Relationships: 53%
3) School: 40%
4) Self: 30%
5) Environment: 24%

YOUNG WOMEN'S TOP FIVE DESIRED CHANGES:

1) Relationships: 45%
2) War/Peace: 37%
3) Environment: 30%
4) Poverty: 26%
5) Discrimination: 23%

GETTING INFORMATION

- information on politics/government hardest to obtain: 26% of young women listed this category
- information on most other topics was listed as easy to obtain by some young women and hard to obtain by others

YOUNG WOMEN'S TOP FIVE QUESTIONS FOR PEERS:

1) Relationships: 30%
2) Environment: 23%
3) Drugs: 21%
4) Life: 20%
5) Self: 20%

ENDNOTES: Chapter Four

1. Establishing this integration may be the most important process in adolescence, observes Francis A.J. Ianni:

   "Ultimately, what is most important is how well the public worlds of the adolescent's peer group, family, the law, and morality become integrated and available for internalization in the individual's personal and private worlds."

   See Francis A.J. Ianni, *The Search for Structure: A Report on American Youth Today* (New York: Free Press, 1989), p. 222.
2. For a look at the way this category breaks down into "family/friends/boyfriends" groupings, see Chapter Two — The Immediate World: Families, Friends, and School.
3. For an example of the results yielded by such a methodology, see the Canadian Teachers' Federation, *A Cappella: A Report on the Realities, Concerns, Expectations, and Barriers Experienced by Adolescent Women in Canada* (Ottawa: 1990), p. 14.
4. Carol Gilligan, Nona P. Lyons, and Trudy J. Hanmer, *Making Connections: The Relational Worlds of Adolescent Girls at Emma Willard School* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 76.
5. That is not to say these channels of information should carry an unambiguous, "authoritative" answer to any given question. On the contrary, exposing young people to diverse, even opposing, points of view can help break down potentially harmful stereotypes. However, it is clear from the survey results that these points of view are not reaching young people in a clear or direct enough fashion to allow them to feel they can evaluate them; indeed, many kinds of information are not reaching some groups of young people at all.
6. Researchers in Canada have only recently begun addressing issues unique to immigrant adolescents.
7. Similarly, a 1986 study of Ontario students found that "when students were given an opportunity to express their concerns, sexual issues were rarely raised." See Alan J.C. King, *The Adolescent Experience* (Toronto: Research Committee, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, 1986), p. 29.
8. The high profile of environmental issues and AIDS in the young women's responses is another sign of the importance issues take on when they affect young people personally and are also prominent in the public sphere, through the media, community groups, and governments.
9. See Barbara Tizard, "Old and New Paradigms: Research on Young People's Response to the Nuclear Threat", *Journal of Adolescence*, vol. 12 (1989), pp. 1-10.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
11. Vivian Shayne and Barbara Kaplan, "AIDS Education for Adolescents", *Youth and Society*, vol. 20, no. 2 (1988), pp. 180-208. In view of the high drop-out rate in high school, AIDS education should be provided in elementary school, with an emphasis on building self-esteem.

AFTERWORD

The CACSW survey has provided a series of "snapshots" of the world, taken from the perspectives of young women. It allows us to see, through their eyes, a variety of images from the world of the self, the immediate world of family, friends and school, and the public sphere. Young women have offered us their thoughts and feelings on a number of issues from health and sexuality to school and politics.

Summarizing their visions is not easy. Indeed, it may not be appropriate. Although the statistical evidence provides patterns, the study also acknowledges the particular and valorizes each person's uniqueness. For example, the majority of young women say they are self-confident; but what of those who are not – who are different and marginal? Their lives matter, to themselves and the culture, and their issues are as real as those of the majority.

Young women in Canada today, as always, are brave in their struggle to achieve both autonomy and interdependence. However, all too many of them are deprived of the chance to feel whole – both independent and strong as well as connected to friends, families, co-workers, teachers, and leaders.

Young women value their families; they hope for intimacy with them. They tend to have fulfilling relationships with their friends. School is important to them. All of these – families, peer groups, and schools – provide opportunities to adults for lively and meaningful interaction with young women. By expressing a strong desire for connections, young women open up possibilities for women of all ages to find common ground on which to talk, common issues on which to take action. Mutual support and action are possible. Together they will create changes, individually and in organizations.

Young women make it clear that they want to connect for talk and for action. The "external world" of paid work and power relations interests them – indeed, they find it compelling. Young women express interest in social and political issues, and want to find people with whom to address them. They point out the urgency of actively and concertedly fostering young women's political understanding and engaging their political commitment.

Popular culture's images of young women as self-absorbed and apolitical do not apply to young women in Canada. They show a desire to communicate, and an interest in searching for involvement beyond the self.

Young women seem implicitly to know that they are not sufficiently valued. They lose some of their spirit and contentment as they get older. Although 13-year-old girls are roughly as confident as 13-year-old boys, by age 16 there is a large difference between the sexes. With the growing realization that society values them less than young men, young women's perceptions of themselves decline.

This trend is also apparent in other realms. The number of young women who are satisfied with their work declines from ages 13 to 16, while the reverse is true for young men. Young women worry more and more about money, come to feel more vulnerable to assault, and experience more stress as they grow older. School becomes less satisfying, as do family relationships.

And yet, their desire for connections does not diminish. Over and over, young women call out for ties with people who will listen to them with respect and offer them support. They yearn for wisdom and sympathy, for "anyone who is willing to ... talk to us (and who really cares)", as one young woman wrote.

The views they express on some issues show how important establishing that contact can be – to all generations. To take an obvious example, most young women are unaware of the effects of gender-based inequality of opportunity on their personal lives, their work, and their schooling. The insights, often learned experientially, that adult women can offer on systemic discrimination and barriers to fulfilment are not reaching many young women. Too often they are left on their own to sort through a bewildering variety of competing ideologies from their families, peer group, workplace, school, the media, and the political sphere. However, as many of them pointed out in their comments, young people do not inhabit a self-contained culture: they are struggling with many of the same questions and the same realities as adults.

Like adult women, young women inhabit a world that sometimes gives them permission to enter, but too often withdraws it. Many of them, living on sufferance, cannot imagine themselves at its centre. They should not be marginalized. They must not remain unheard.

Adolescents and adults can connect in informal networks, at the levels that touch most immediately on their lives. The solutions to national and local problems will derive from the political creativity of people meeting face to face. Women of all ages can extend each other's political understandings, combining knowledge of the present with historical memory.

Young women must be offered a vocabulary of concepts and ideas with which to express themselves, perhaps first to themselves and finally out loud. Adult women can work with them in every possible setting, offering them their insights and histories. Young women will contribute their energy, their ideas, their creativity, and their hope. Together they can change the institutions and ideologies that shape their lives.

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

The following provides a detailed description of the methodology used in the CACSW study on adolescents.

Sampling

Using provincial/territorial school directories, school jurisdictions were ordered by size and type (separate or public). Within each jurisdiction, schools having grades 8, 9, and 10 were selected using a systematic stage cluster sampling procedure. In order to generalize the findings to young women enrolled in Canadian schools in grades 8, 9, and 10 with a confidence interval of five percentage points either way, 19 times out of 20, it was estimated that a sample size of 1600 was required.

The national acceptance rate on the first contact was sufficient to ensure the minimum number of students for the required sample set. Because time was a constraint, no further contact was initiated. Forty-nine school jurisdictions responded immediately to the initial letter mailed to them requesting their participation in the project. Forty-four school jurisdictions granted approval; two jurisdictions denied it because of ongoing labour negotiations, while two others refused to participate because of an item in the survey referring to sexual abuse. One jurisdiction's further requirements could not be accommodated within the research schedule. Two of the jurisdictions granting approval requested that parental consent forms be completed; this procedure was followed in those jurisdictions.

Administration of the Survey

The researchers requested that the survey be administered by educational personnel during class time, and in a core subject area selected by the school, during the months of March and April, 1990. Students were presented with a cover letter (see Appendix B) outlining the purpose of the study as well as the survey and an envelope. Upon completing the survey, students sealed it into the envelope, ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the data. Student participation was voluntary.

Analysis and Presentation of the Data

Parametric and non-parametric statistical tests were run to determine differences and relationships. Probability was established at 0.05. We decided not to resort to statistical

explanations when presenting the data, but the results of these tests influenced the selection and interpretation of the reported findings.

With regard to the technical strength of the forced-choice items, it should be noted that the students were selective when they circled the **strongly agree** response. For young women, the highest response rate for the **strongly agree** category was 87.1% and the lowest, 8.8%; for young men, the highest response rate for the **strongly agree** category was 82.2% and the lowest, 4.9%.

Development of the Survey

The survey was designed as a global, rather than a specific, instrument in order to provide glimpses of many facets of young women's lives. It was, obviously, wide-ranging but hardly exhaustive. Unlike a study with an experimental design, a descriptive study is not aimed at verifying theory. Its utility lies in the extent to which the findings contribute not only to reporting the status quo, but also to stimulating thought, generating new theories, and prompting further inquiry. Its questions were derived from the literature on adolescence, the concerns of members of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, and our own experience with young women and with the women's movement in Canada. We could have asked many more questions, but we chose not to because respondents' attention and concentration lag when surveys are too long.

We did not ask adolescents to supply information about variables that certainly affect attitudes and perceptions, such as socio-economic status, sexuality, religion, and ethnicity. If one is to report, with numerical precision, on such variables, a more specific and delimited study must be designed to address them. We did not intend to determine which variables most influenced attitudes and perceptions among young women. We conducted a global investigation that reported on the subjective experiences and perceptions of young women and that combined two different survey methodologies – qualitative and quantitative.

It is important to point out that definitions of words such as "discrimination" and "minority groups" are not the same for everyone. Each adolescent brought both culturally constructed meanings and her/his own experience to those words. That is, a certain subjectivity inheres in the responses. Some of the

responses cry out for further investigation. The evidence that over 25% of the young women perceived that minority groups were discriminated against in their schools is one example. Though we do not know precisely what "discrimination" means to the respondents, nor to which minority groups they refer, further study may yield more precise results, and insights for political action.

Respondent Representation

The number of completed surveys was 3207; 1603 were completed by females, 1604 by males. Respondent representation by geographical area was: British Columbia and the Prairie provinces, 25.2%; Ontario, 31.3%; Quebec, 27.1%; Atlantic provinces, 16.4%. Respondent representation by sex was: British Columbia and the Prairie provinces, 25.2% female, 25.3% male; Ontario, 30.9% female, 31.6% male; Quebec, 27.7% female, 26.6% male; Atlantic provinces, 16.2% female, 16.5% male. Respondent representation by age was: under age 13, 0.8%; age 13, 17.9%; age 14, 28.3%; age 15, 30.7%; age 16, 17.2%; age 17, 3.9%; over age 17, 1.1%; data missing, 0.1%. The number of parents/guardians living with the respondents were: none, 0.8%; one, 16.6%; two, 80.4%; other, 2.0%; data missing, 0.2%.

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE

The following cover letter was attached to the questionnaire which was distributed to survey participants.

> The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women is collecting information about the interests and concerns of young people. What you think and how you feel about yourself and issues in your life are important. Your opinions and those of other young people participating in the study throughout Canada will be examined to provide a picture of the present and future needs of individuals like you.
>
> To ensure the privacy of your responses, an envelope has been provided. Please do not put your name on the questionnaire or the envelope. Upon completing the questionnaire, seal it in the envelope. You are encouraged to respond to all questions or statements and to indicate your honest and frank opinions.
>
> Thank you for taking the time to help us hear the voices of young people in Canada.

Facts about you

Please **circle** the appropriate response.

1. Indicate your sex.
   1) Female 2) Male

2. Indicate the region in which you live.
   1) British Columbia
   2) Prairie Provinces
   3) Ontario
   4) Quebec
   5) Atlantic Provinces
   6) Yukon/N.W.T.

3. Indicate your age
   1) under 13
   2) 13
   3) 14
   4) 15
   5) 16
   6) 17
   7) over 17

4. Indicate the number of parent(s)/guardian(s) with whom you live during a typical week day.
   1) I live with no parent/guardian.
   2) I live with one parent/guardian.
   3) I live with two parents/guardians.
   4) Other (specify) _____

For each of the following questions, please fill in the blank. Use only **whole numbers**, that is, 0, 1, 2, 3, 4,...

5. Estimate the number of hours **per week** that you are employed and receive pay for that work. _____hours

6. Estimate the number of hours **per week** that you work but do **not** receive pay. (Do **not** include homework, but **do** include work in the house, work around the yard, unpaid babysitting, helping in the family business, etc.) _____hours

7. Estimate the number of hours **per week** that you do homework. _____hours

8. Estimate the number of hours **per week** that you read either for enjoyment and/or for information relating to your personal interests and concerns. (Do **not** include hours related to school assignments and tests.) _____hours

Your Opinions

For the following statements, please **circle** the extent of your agreement: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, or undecided.

		Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*	*Undecided*
9.	I have a number of good qualities.	SA	A	D	SD	UN
10.	I worry about money.	SA	A	D	SD	UN
11.	My employment opportunities areas good as those of people my age of the opposite sex.	SA	A	D	SD	UN
12.	My appearance is important to me.	SA	A	D	SD	UN
13.	I like school.	SA	A	D	SD	UN
14.	My relationship with my family is **not** important to me.	SA	A	D	SD	UN
15.	I often feel lonely.	SA	A	D	SD	UN
16.	Achievement in school is important to me.	SA	A	D	SD	UN
17.	I expect that ten years from now I will be employed full time.	SA	A	D	SD	UN
18.	I intend to finish high school.	SA	A	D	SD	UN
19.	Minority groups are discriminated against in my school.	SA	A	D	SD	UN
20.	I plan my school subjects with my future in mind.	SA	A	D	SD	UN
21.	Decisions made by politicians in Canada have little influence on my present life.	SA	A	D	SD	UN
22.	I am confident about my ability to defend myself from physical and other types of abuse.	SA	A	D	SD	UN
23.	When I leave high school, I know what I am going to do.	SA	A	D	SD	UN
24.	I am self-confident.	SA	A	D	SD	UN
25.	I experience a great deal of stress in my life.	SA	A	D	SD	UN
26.	I have **not** experienced sexual abuse.	SA	A	D	SD	UN
27.	Girls and boys have the same opportunity to succeed in school.	SA	A	D	SD	UN
28.	I feel good about myself.	SA	A	D	SD	UN

For each of the following, please **circle** the extent of your satisfaction: very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, very dissatisfied, or don't care.

	Very Satisfied	*Somewhat Satisfied*	*Somewhat Dissatisfied*	*Very Dissatisfied*	*Don't Care*
29. Your appearance	VS	SS	SD	VD	DC
30. Your friendships	VS	SS	SD	VD	DC
31. Your health	VS	SS	SD	VD	DC
32. Your paid work	VS	SS	SD	VD	DC
33. Your finances	VS	SS	SD	VD	DC
34. Your housing	VS	SS	SD	VD	DC
35. Your relationships with your family	VS	SS	SD	VD	DC
36. Your achievements in school	VS	SS	SD	VD	DC
37. Your life as a whole	VS	SS	SD	VD	DC

Your interests and concerns

38. If **you** could invite any **three** people to speak or visit at your school, whom would **you** select? (Please name the people).

    1) _____ 2) _____

    3) _____

39. If **you** could change anything in your personal life and/or the world, describe **three** changes that **you** would make.

    1)

    2)

    3)

40. Adults sometimes attempt to identify the major concerns, problems or fears of young people. What do **you** think are **five** of the **most important** concerns, problems or fears for **you** and people your age at the present time?

    1)

    2)

    3)

    4)

    5)

41. For some topics, young people can easily get information that is helpful to them. List **three** such topics in which **you** are interested.

    1) _____ 2) _____

    3) _____

42. However, for other topics, young people have difficulty getting information that is helpful to them. List **three** such topics about which **you** would like more information.

    1) _____ 2) _____

    3) _____

43. Suppose you had the opportunity to listen to the opinions of young people. What **three** questions would you ask them?

    Question 1:

    Question 2:

    Question 3:

APPENDIX C: PREVIOUS CACSW RECOMMENDATIONS ON ADOLESCENT WOMEN

As part of its mandate to advise the federal government and educate the public, the CACSW passes official policy recommendations on a wide variety of issues affecting the women of Canada. The following CACSW recommendations refer specifically to adolescent women.

Birth Planning E1.5
CONTRACEPTION AND EDUCATION June 1979

The CACSW wishes to draw attention to the fact that there are a number of recommendations on which no action has yet been taken, including those of October 1975 and those of September 1976.

In addition, the CACSW recommends:

1. that the Minister of National Health and Welfare review the priorities of the "Family Planning Grants Program" to make it possible for the voluntary sector to be more involved;

2. that the Minister of National Health and Welfare arrange to have undertaken research studies dealing with contraception for adolescent and adult males;

3. that the government urge the Medical Research Council to raise the proportion of grants allotted to biological reproduction and to support a greater number of clinical trials;

4. that the Minister of National Health and Welfare establish programs and services directly adapted to the specific needs of adolescents, low-income groups, and residents of rural communities and that he arrive at an agreement with the provinces to put these programs and services into operation;

5. that the importance of making family life and sex education part of regular school curricula at the primary and secondary levels be placed by the federal government on the agenda of the next meeting of federal and provincial Ministers of Health and Welfare and Education;

6. that courses in contraception and human sexuality be part of the non-elective curricula in the faculties of medicine, nursing, and social work;

7. that the same kind of comprehensive family planning program available through the International Development Research Centre be available to all Canadians.

Violence Against Children F2.2
SEXUAL ASSAULT October 1979

The CACSW reiterates its recommendation that young persons should be protected from sexual exploitation as follows:

(a) a "statutory" sexual assault offence should apply when the victim is under 14;
(b) it should be an offence for someone in authority to sexually coerce young people under 18.

Violence Against Women F2.4
PROSTITUTION December 1983

The CACSW recommends:

1. that further investigation of the cause and character of juvenile prostitution be done, and that the public be educated about any subsequent findings;

2. that programs be developed to prevent the sexual abuse of children and to support victims of it;

3. that programs be set up to help adolescents who are already living on the streets protect themselves from abuse and move into more positive modes of living;

4. the following change in the Criminal Code: that offering to purchase or purchasing sexual services of a person under the age of 18 should be made a criminal offence. Mistake of fact as to the age of the adolescent would not be a defence.

Birth Planning E1.6
ADOLESCENT WOMEN June 1985

Whereas

- the responsibilities of teenage motherhood generally have long-term, negative, socio-economic impacts on the entire adult life of young women;
- sexually transmitted diseases affect the health of young women and may threaten their fertility if they don't receive proper health care in time;
- receiving adequate education would allow adolescents to make enlightened choices concerning sexuality;

the CACSW recommends:

1. that all organizations of which the mandate is to educate the public and youth on family life planning and sex education receive from the government the financial assistance required to carry out their work;

2. that courses in family life planning and sex education be offered in schools across Canada, and that periodic evaluation of such education be effected by qualified personnel.

Job Creation and Training Policies A1.3
ADOLESCENT WOMEN June 1985

Whereas

- female adolescents are required to make educational and professional choices which may influence much, if not all, of their adult life;
- in conformity with the standards which prevail in our society, male and female adolescents do not enter roles of equal status, with females traditionally entering low-status fields;

the CACSW recommends

1. that the federal government set up programs to encourage women and adolescents to develop skills in mathematics, science, and technology; and to have access to a wide range of trades and professions in areas where they are under-represented, so that they will not be restricted to traditional women's careers;

2. that, in all its programs serving youth in any way, the federal government ensure that the funds allocated benefit equally young women and young men; and that the eligibility requirements for such programs provide effectively equal access to both;

3. that the federal government, within the framework of federal-provincial talks on education, encourage discussion on means and programs necessary to achieve non-sexist education across Canada;

4. that the federal government encourage research in areas where information on adolescent women is lacking, and that such research take into account geographical location and ethnic or native origins of young Canadian women.

Sex Stereotypes H1.1
ADOLESCENT WOMEN June 1985

Whereas the electronic media exercise considerable influence over adolescents, in that they provide adolescents with a range of social behaviour with which they can identify;

the CACSW recommends:

1. that the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, by means of regulation, ensure that all radio and television programming be free of sexist content and that sex-role stereotyping be progressively eliminated from it so as to encourage the development of positive and innovative social role models;

2. that the federal government increase its funding of Studio D productions and of the National Film Board's Federal Women's Film Program so that these groups may continue producing their series of films depicting for the female adolescents of Canada models of non-traditional personal and professional life.

Recreation G2.1
ADOLESCENT WOMEN June 1985

Whereas the lifestyle of adolescents influences their health and general well-being;

the CACSW recommends that the federal government develop or support cultural and sport programs so as to provide equal opportunities for social and physical development to adolescents of both sexes.

Battered Women
WIFE BATTERING (cont'd*)

F1.10
September 1987

VI. Women who are Doubly Isolated

Whereas

- there are many women who face even greater obstacles in trying to deal with wife battering, especially women living in rural or isolated areas, aboriginal, immigrant, visible minority, teenage, older women and women with disabilities as well as women living on military bases;
- many women in shelters often face language or cultural barriers;

the CACSW recommends:

1. that the federal government provide, where appropriate, shelters and/or support services which are designed to meet the special needs of rural, isolated, aboriginal, visible minority, teenage, older women and women with disabilities as well as women living on military bases;

2. that the federal government provide special funds to shelters for the provision of services to women facing cultural or language barriers, including hiring translators and those proficient in sign language, as needed, to help workers communicate with women who speak neither of Canada's official languages.

* Editor's note: this extract from a complete recommendation on wife battering deals with young women

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